VISIT…

THE KATHLEEN HAWKINS GUIDE TO

Sales and Marketing

FOR PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

Amherst Media®
PUBLISHER OF PHOTOGRAPHY BOOKS

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our incredibly handsome son, Brandon Gregory Hawkins, born on December 26, 2006, whom we adopted on June 21, 2007. We are so glad you became part of our family. You complete us, and we love you very much! This is the first book I've written since we adopted our three beautiful children. It was not an easy task juggling such a hectic life of kids, work, and writing. Without the support and safe haven of our wonderful church, it would not have been possible. They provide a place to retreat to, where I can clear my mind and collect my thoughts. Thank you!

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About the Author

Kathleen Hawkins is an accomplished industry consultant, speaker, and award-winning photographer who, along with her husband, Jeff, owns a successful wedding and portrait photography studio located in Longwood, Florida. A three-time winner of PPA's AN-NE First Place Award for marketing excellence, Kathleen has served as president of The Wedding Professionals of Central Florida and as the affiliate representative of the National Association of Catering Executives. She holds her Photographic Craftsman degree, earned an MA in Business Administration, and taught business courses at a Florida university.

Kathleen is the author of seven books published by Amherst Media, including *Digital Photography for Children's and Family Portraiture* (2nd ed.; 2007) and *Professional Techniques for Digital Wedding Photography* (2nd ed.; 2004; coauthored by Jeff Hawkins). Her work has been published in Bill Hurter's *The Best of Wedding Photography* (2005) and *The Best of Wedding Photojournalism* (2004), both published by Amherst Media. She has been a contributor to *Rangefinder*, *Professional Photographer*, *PC Photo*, and *American Photo* and has been featured several times in *PhotoVision Video Magazine*.

Kathleen is proud to be a licensed foster parent and adopted mother of three. She and Jeff are strong advocates of adoption. Jeff is the chief photographer for the Heart Gallery of Central Florida, which displays many portraits of the children up for adoption in Central Florida. Kathleen currently serves on the Devereux Florida Board of Directors and is the Heart Gallery of Central Florida committee chairperson and community liason. Last year alone, their images helped eleven children find homes!

Introduction

Today's photographers face a host of problems that previous generations never had to contend with. Our industry is changing at such a fast pace that we cannot even attempt to keep up. New prosumer and professional cameras are debuting daily and are lower in price than ever before. Also, skills essential to our practitioners are now the domain of even high school graduates who know more about Photoshop, web site development, and blogging than most of us who have spent years working in this industry. Album companies are trying to compete for brides' attention, labs are trying to compete with the consumers who can print their images on their desktop printers, and photographers are trying to compete with the computer savvy clients who are in a digital frenzy.

What does that mean for the professional photographer? It means you are no longer just a photographer. It means now, more than ever before,

Now photographers have to stay competitive by creating unique portraits, using technology to design something different and offering more than just a traditional print.

Photographers today must also be skilled as image retouchers and graphic artists.

you are a photographic artist, a retoucher, a graphic artist, a business owner, a manager, a sales clerk, a psychologist, and a friend. To succeed, you must wear a variety of hats.

This book is designed to teach any self-employed photographer how to stay competitive in this ever changing industry. It will show you how to develop the business strategies you need to drive your studio's success. In these pages, we will explore the basics of business development. We'll look at creating a business identity through branding, the importance of building customer loyalty, and how to create and implement client retention programs and portrait opportunities that keep clients coming back. We'll also look at the equipment you'll need to stay competitive in the field.

"Develop the business strategies you need to drive your studio's success."

Whether you are in the planning stages of starting a new business or currently running your own studio, you'll find in this book the tips and techniques that will help you achieve your business goals and increase your profits.

1. Targeting Your Audience

Are you always trying to keep up with the Joneses? Do you find yourself wanting more and wondering how to obtain it? Do you want to know why another studio is making more money than yours, though your images are of a better quality? All too often, business owners sit back and wonder why they can't make ends meet at the end of the month or why they can't grow beyond their current level of success. They think they have a good business plan and can't figure out why it isn't coming together.

Often, we encounter studio owners who do not understand why they can't obtain the level of success they want to achieve. Have you ever wondered why some studios can get $200.00 for an 8x10-inch print but others struggle to justify the worth of a $2.00 print? Your success in the industry has to do with more than the image you capture. You can be a mediocre photographer and soar to the top of the photographic industry.

What steps can you take to ensure higher profitability? The journey starts with defining and achieving the right business image.

BELOW AND FACING PAGE—The business image you create for your studio will determine how you brand your company in the eyes of your consumer and how much value they put on your work.

Business Image

An effective business image tells the world who you are and attracts the attention of your desired clientele. If your brand has a high perceived value, you will enjoy many advantages over your competition, especially when it comes to pricing. However, if the perceived value of your business is low, you will struggle to move out of the low-end market share.

"An effective business image tells the world who you are."

Every aspect of your business should speak to the type of client you wish to draw into your studio. For instance, if your desired demographic is high-school seniors, your advertising and marketing, studio decor, and pricing should appeal to people in that age group. Your image should be fresh, trendy, and vibrant.

Though there are many genres and demographics that a photographer can elect to target, we'll look at the tactics photographers can use to set their sights on a high-end, mid-range, or low-end clientele. This will give you a starting point that can be further tweaked to appeal to an even smaller segment of the market if you desire.

High End. This is a high-end business that takes pride in developing a prestigious, exclusive atmosphere. The products they sell are very high end

Try This!

Take a day and go into three different stores. Analyze every detail of the establishment. For example, think about the entrance, the paint color, lighting, and employees—everything you encounter from floor to ceiling. Spend some time in a high-end, mid-range, and low-end business. Nordstrom's, for example, is known to appeal to a higher-end market. Their customer service is considered superior and their merchandise is always top brand quality. Macy's targets a mid-range demographic. Their products are image branded and good quality, but there is more diversity in the service. Lastly, visit a store like Marshalls or Ross, which promotes discounted products. They may have branded, quality products, but the appeal to clients is the price of the products, not the atmosphere, service, or experience. In each of the three stores, consider the following:

1. What was your initial reaction as you walked into the establishment?
2. What was the décor like? How did you feel as you shopped?
3. How were the sales associates dressed? How did they approach you?
4. How neatly were the items displayed? Was it easy to shop or did you have to search through disorganized racks?
5. What was your overall opinion of the shopping experience?

(and in the case of retail establishments, have designer labels). Such businesses offer a high standard of customer service. The customer base will be smaller, but these individuals will be able to afford high prices.

Mid-Range. A mid-range business might wish to be perceived as offering good value for the money. Their products are of a good quality. This prospective customer group is large, but because many businesses are competing for the same customers, the competition can be a little fiercer.

Low End. A low-end business promotes inexpensive or discounted products that may appeal to a client demographic with less disposable income. The products they sell and the services they offer are limited to the basics. This type of business is likely to have a high volume of clients, but with the lower price point, the sales averages tend to be lower.

"Branding is becoming increasingly important for studios, large and small."

Brand Recognition

A brand is a class of goods or services that can be identified by name as the product of a particular company. Coca-Cola, for instance, is instantly recognizable in the marketplace due to its consistent use of its script logo and the colors red and white. While it's easy to see how such a large company can benefit from sparking recognition amongst prospective clients, branding is becoming increasingly important for studios, large and small. It is easier than ever before to pick up a prosumer camera, create a web site, and run a home-based business—and that means that there are a slew of other photographers out there competing for your prospective client's time and money. By carefully sculpting your business image, you can set yourself apart from the competition and increase your clients' perceived value.

Can you guess which event the clients spent more money on? Notice how the little details like the upgraded chairs, the specialty linens, and the lighting enhance the appearance of the event. This is the same with your business image. The type of fabrics you select, the lighting, the furniture—all of these factors will play a role in creating your business identity and its perceived value.

Our studio designed this logo while attending a WPPI convention in Las Vegas. We literally sat on a bench at Caesar's Palace and studied the couture stores to determine why some stores looked more elegant than others. Consider doing the same research before committing to your own logo design.

There are many factors that must be considered when building brand recognition. Consistent use of company name, logo, and tag line are essential ingredients. Create an image that will attract attention and will endure for years to come. This is something that should require a good amount of planning. A dull brand image will be a letdown to you and your customers, and one that capitalizes on current trends will appear outdated in a short period of time and will need to be changed frequently.

Your brand should be evident in all of your marketing materials. Your letterhead, business cards, postcards, brochures, web site, signage, and studio interior should all be designed to create a singular brand experience for your clients. Make consistent use of your studio name, logo, color theme,

Your marketing materials need to have synergy—make sure the logo, colors, and feel of your mailers, web site, and other elements of your studio's public face harmonize.

etc., to portray your business in a way that will appeal to your desired clientele. If you specialize in traditional portraiture, for instance, be sure that the colors and typestyles used in your communications suit classic images, then incorporate portraits in your displays and mailers that reinforce this message.

If you are just starting out in this business, your brand can be applied to every visual aspect of your business at once. However, if you have been in business for some time, it might be best to begin revamping one item at a time to ultimately achieve your company's brand transformation. Whatever the status of your studio, it's best to approach the design of a logo first. You should be able to consistently use the design in a variety of media. It should be suitable for corporate letterhead and business cards, as well as for your web site and corporate signage (if any). You do *not* want a confusing mishmash of logos and banners and heaven knows what else. Everything you produce needs to use the same, consistent style of logo so that, over time, your logo becomes synonymous with your brand. Instant recognition is what you're going for here, so don't dilute it by using several different logos for different purposes.

Consider outsourcing the design of your logo, tag line, printed marketing materials, and web site to a company that specializes in graphic de-

A Little Help from the Pros

Consider using Marathon Press's Marketing Value Plan or Marketing Basics Plan to create a consistent marketing message. Upon paying a membership fee, the company will design your products, prepare and store image files, and manage your web site design and Internet hosting. The costs of the program are broken down into twenty-four payments, which can be a lifesaver if you're starting out or want to revamp a large portion of your marketing materials.

sign. Remember, just because you can do something does not mean you should. Often photographers spend too much time trying to be too many people, never realizing that if they just focused on revenue-generating activities and gave the design task to a graphic designer or advertising specialist they would be much happier with their bottom line. To begin building your business identity, list your business's key features and characteristics, competitive advantages, and anything else that sets you apart from your competition.

Companies with a solid business identity and careful branding tend to be stronger and more successful in general. Consistency in your marketing efforts conveys a strong sense of professionalism and breeds familiarity. Needless to say, this appeals to prospective clients, who like to feel assured that your studio will provide the service and image quality your public presence conveys.

Many studios try to have a very contemporary feel when upgrading their studio image. Update your studio, but be careful not to make your studio too trendy. Select neutral colors for your walls and furnishings; they will appeal to clients longer than trendy paint colors and funky décor elements.

2. Building a Bond

Once you attract your desired client demographic to your studio, you must determine whether you can meet their needs, show them how working with your studio will benefit them, and cultivate an atmosphere that will nourish the photographer/client bond.

The First Contact: Product vs. Price

Recently, a prospective client contacted our studio and asked about our prices. Though it would have been easy to quote the prices of our smallest and largest packages and assume the caller was shopping for a photographer based on price and would settle for a lower-priced studio's services, this was not the case. This particular shopper was an administrative assistant shopping prices for their boss. The boss happened to be a Fortune 500 company owner and multimillionaire. He was not looking for an 8x10 and several 5x7s, and he was *definitely* not cheap! He was looking for two custom-framed 30x40-inch oil-painted portraits. If we had quoted our standard package prices without asking questions, the caller would have thought our prices were low—and a low price tag can signal a lower-end product. That's not the business image we want to project.

"The boss happened to be a Fortune 500 company owner and multimillionaire."

When a prospective client calls about prices you are given the opportunity to ask questions and identify their wants and needs. Coincidentally, in determining how your studio can meet the caller's needs, you are beginning to create an interpersonal bond and are controlling the interaction.

Put Your Best Foot Forward

Take care in assigning the right employee to the task of handling calls or visits from prospective clients. The best candidate for this job is someone who is creative enough to ask the right questions to learn about the caller's wants and needs and talented enough to relay the ways in which the studio will meet their needs.

If your business is small, you may need to handle this task yourself. Using the tips for bonding with your client outlined in this chapter will help keep you focused on meeting your client's needs in the obvious and subtle ways that will win them over.

Always ask questions before quoting package prices over the phone. Take the time to find out what the prospective client wants so you can customize a package that meets their needs.

Let's review how a call might transpire when the focus is on price rather than on the needs of the caller. An average business might answer the phone and respond to the "How much does it cost?" question as follows:

Caller: "I am getting married. How much do your packages run?"
Photographer: "Great, our event packages start at $2,500.00 and go up from there depending on the photographer selected, the number of images being showcased, and the product desired."
Caller: "What is included in the $2,500.00?"
Photographer: "A master DVD with copyright release to the images, a 10x10-inch album with seventy-five images, and eight hours worth of coverage."
Caller: "Do you work with an assistant? Will there be two photographers or one?"
Photographer: "It will be myself and an assistant. The assistant is a photographer in training. Our studio has been capturing events for ten years and we are sure to provide you with the quality images you desire."
Caller: "Let me talk to my fiancé and I will get back to you."
Photographer: "Okay. We look forward to hearing from you again soon." (Thinking, as they hang up the phone, *cheap shopper!*)

The average business owner will try to sell clients on price first and will then list the products included in the package to justify the price. Eventually, they will begin to try to sell the prospective client on the quality of the studio—that is, if the client did not hang up after hearing the price. It is usually not until the client has responded positively about the price, products, and studio that the photographer lets down their guard and begins to establish a bond. However, your chances of booking a session and be-

ginning the process of creating a client for life are much greater if the bond with the client happens from the start of the communication. It is also much easier to form this bond from the introduction than it is at any other point in the relationship.

The following dialog shows how the same basic dialog can be handled when the photographer takes control of the conversation and begins to bond with the caller.

Caller: "I am getting married. How much do your packages run?"

Photographer: "That's terrific. Congratulations! What is the event date? Where will the ceremony take place? What are your plans for the reception?"

Caller: "Our wedding will be held at the botanical gardens on Main Street on Saturday, March 23, 2010. Our reception will be held at the Hilton Ballroom on South Avenue." (*Note:* The response to this question should tell you a lot. A small ceremony held during the week might be customized differently than a larger event. The venue should give you an idea as to what type of event it will be.)

Photographer: "Well, that sounds terrific. What are you looking for as far as your photography is concerned? Have you met with any other studios as of yet?"

Caller: "I think I need about six hours worth of coverage. I like the photojournalistic approach to photography. I do not want a lot of

An incredible business sells themselves first by bonding with their prospects and identifying their needs.

The couple is excited about the love they are feeling and their special day. Take a moment to share in their excitement. You may deal with weddings all the time, but they don't. This is a big deal to them!

posed images." (*Note:* Asking questions begins the dialog and allows the studio to control the direction of the conversation. Building the dialog is the first step to creating the connection.)

Photographer: "As a matter of fact, our studio specializes in photojournalistic portraits, and our photographers have won several photojournalistic print competition awards! Why don't we see if we can schedule a visit to the gallery so you can take a closer look at our work and view all the album options available?" (*Note:* In responding this way, the photographer has begun to sell the studio. By listening to the caller's responses to questions you can play up the aspects of your business that will suit their needs.)

Caller: "Okay, that would be great. Can you give me an idea of what your packages run, so I know if it is in my budget?"

Think About It

When prospective clients call your studio, they will immediately inquire about your prices. Does this mean that this is their most important criteria in finding a studio that suits their needs? Not exactly. Usually, they ask because they think it's a question they are supposed to ask. After all, do you expect them to pick up the phone, call you, and say, "Hey, I just had a baby boy! Can I tell you all about him?" Of course not! They don't even know you. Therefore, they are going to ask what they think you expect them to ask. What do your packages range? How much is a session? What are your prices?

The way you handle that first phone call (or e-mail query) sets the tone for the experience your client will have with your studio. Take the opportunity to engage the client in conversation. Ask, "What type of portrait are you looking for? A baby portrait?" Say, "That's terrific! Do you have a boy or girl? Oh my gosh, that's wonderful! What is his name? How old is he?" Every mother wants to talk about their precious baby. Every bride wants to talk about how her fiancé proposed. In asking personal questions you are beginning to bond with the client and show them there's more to the experience than the price of the prints. In asking questions, you will also find ways to key the client in to the benefits of working with your studio.

Photographer: "Our prices vary depending on the photographer you select, the number of images, and the type of album you prefer. This helps us to customize a session that suits our clients' needs. Do you have a budget that you are looking to adhere to?" (*Note:* At this point we are selling them on the fact that we offer a flexibility that will suit their financial and creative needs.)

Caller: "Most of the other studios have quoted prices of $1,500.00 and up. I am not real sure."

Photographer: "Well, it's hard to shop over the phone, simply because the styles and options vary so greatly from one product to another. When we get together, we will do our best to help educate you on all the options available. When is the best time for you and your fiancé to visit the gallery?" (*Note:* We have only touched upon the topic of cost and did not quote any prices. If you must, offer a price range for the type of coverage the caller is looking for, but never until you have asked enough questions to determine what it is they want.)

"We offer a flexibility that will suit their financial and creative needs."

Caller: "I guess evenings are typically best for us. Do you have evening appointments?"

Photographer: "Evenings are available, but they book up fast. We can schedule your appointment for next Thursday at 6:00PM or the following Tuesday at 7:00PM. Which one of those dates works best for you?"

Caller: "Thursday should work for us."

Photographer: "Great, we look forward to seeing you then. If you wish to provide your e-mail address, I will send directions to the studio."

All too often, studios focus on price rather than building a rapport with their client or identifying the customer's wants and needs. An average business focuses on the price first, the product or service second, the company third, and themselves last. An incredible business focuses on selling themselves first, their company second, their product third, and the price last.

Customer Service

The easiest way to build a client connection is to provide superior customer service. After all, if a customer is not satisfied with the services you offer, they will not do repeat business with your company. Your studio should have a customer contact person who makes customers feel welcome and is readily available. Contacts with customers should be pleasant and courteous.

Every mother wants to brag about their pride and joy. Ask questions and give them a chance to share this wonderful time in their life with you. It is the first step toward creating a lifelong bond.

A very wise woman, Mary Kay, of Mary Kay Cosmetics, once preached, "Everyone wears a sign that says make me feel special." We believe she was right. That is a motto our entire studio lives by, and it has proven to be very powerful for us. If you take the time to see people as people, regardless of their situation, you will begin to build powerful, lifelong relationships.

During a seminar, a studio owner asked if pretending to be friendly made you too phony. You should not pretend to be friendly, you should actually *be* friendly. If you don't like the customers you are attracting, then you are drawing the wrong clients, and retaining them should not matter. There is an old saying that people do business with people they like. You should be doing business with people you like, too.

Follow these simple tips to build a stronger client connection:

1. Make your studio inviting. The business entrance should be welcoming. Encourage your staff to project a friendly, caring professional image. Set up a refreshment center and offer bottled water or another beverage to your clients. Your goal is to satisfy their immediate needs and make them feel comfortable.

The first person a client sees when entering your business makes a lasting powerful impression. Be sure that first impression is a good one.

Your goal should be to make every customer feel special regardless of their age. Strive to make all your clients happy and always choose your battles wisely.

2. Use warm and welcoming images on your web site and in your marketing materials. Consider using portraits of smiling subjects and an image of your comfortable, inviting lobby to create a welcoming feel.
3. Introduce yourself using your first name and use your prospective clients' first names as often as possible when talking over the phone or in person. This personalizes your dialog and creates stronger interpersonal skills.
4. Watch eye contact and body language. If you are daydreaming about your things-to-do list, the customer will sense your lack of interest, and the foundation of your connection will begin to diminish. Don't just hear what the client is saying, visualize it!

5. Never forget the value of a thank you. Consider using Marathon Press's Client Connection program to thank your clients in a professional manner. With this program, you can send as little as one card at a time, and the cards can be mailed for less than the cost of a typical card and a stamp. You can also add a custom image and personalize the message. Consider using these cards to notify prospective and current clients about special offers. This is a terrific means of achieving repeat business with your clients. An offer such as a complimentary portrait session, 25 percent off the next order, 10 percent off of a custom framed portrait, or a free gift with the next session keeps clients coming back to your studio.

"Knowing something about your customer is just as important as knowing everything about your product."—Harvey Mackay

Now that you have captured their interest and established a connection, you'll need to take the steps required to maintain the connection throughout the client's lifetime.

Though there are many factors that can impede the development of your relationship (e.g., the client may move, they may lose the discretionary income required to purchase portrait sessions, etc.), you should strive to eliminate any controllable variables (e.g., a poor studio experience) that could lead your clients to seek another photographer's services.

Set Your Studio Apart

The widespread popularity of digital photography means that weekend warriors and shutter moms are making an income on the side—and this means that your prospective clients, who for the most part can't distinguish a quality difference between an image made by a professional and one made by an above-average snapshooter, have more options than ever before when it comes to having their portraits made.

Before the digital revolution, there were typically three main studio categories: studios that sought to appeal to a low-end market and produced a higher volume of work; studios that sought to appeal to the high-end market and produced a lower volume of work; and studios that attempted to appeal to the mid-range market and pick up everyone between the ends of the spectrum.

The main difference between the three categories was the level of customer service they offered. Higher-end studios characteristically made their studios more inviting, delivered prints in pretty boxes and bags, and offered clients cute little gifts as pricing incentives. The lower-end studio didn't want to mess with all that frilly stuff and was willing to photograph and deliver their images for a low price—and then walk away. Mid-range studios offered something in between.

Take the extra step to deliver your products with a little class and style.

Camera prices are dropping, and this has inspired countless folks to try their hand at creating a web site, open a home-based business, and call themselves professional photographers. These photographers are often very happy with generating $500.00–$1,000.00 a week or per assignment. Though the profit is fabulous for them, it drives our event industry prices down and affects the business opportunities available to labs, album companies, etc. As a result, more and more studio owners are having to change their marketing philosophy to stay competitive. This shift is, for example, neccessitating that many mid-range studios make a choice between two business strategies. The first is taking a "show up, shoot, and turn over a CD" attitude—*and* often lowering their prices. Alternately, they have to meaningfully enhance the perceived quality of their services, offering su-

perior customer service that makes the customer respond to the experience, not just the price or products.

Not long ago, we had a client in our studio for her portrait viewing session. We loved this one particular photograph, but when we showed it to the woman, she said, "Oh, it's okay. I don't really like that I cannot see Michael's face, and I'd prefer something that is more of a close-up." As it turns out, my husband, Jeff Hawkins, submitted that print for the Professional Photographers of America print competition. He scored a loan print—one of the highest scores a photographer can be awarded—with that very image. The moral of the story is, until you have achieved the brand recognition and business image that will compel clients to hire you based on your name alone, the price of your work, the level of service you provide, and the portrait experience you create are factors you need to control in order to get the client's attention, earn their devotion, and make big sales.

"A successful studio owner knows how to conduct their studio's business."

An Action Plan

A successful studio owner knows how to conduct their studio's business. Forming a relationship with your client is the first step toward ensuring your success. Of course, there's more to the equation than partaking in

LEFT—Offering limited edition or themed portraits, such as this Furry Friends Valentine's promotion, keeps clients excited and coming back for more.

FACING PAGE—The client might not have appreciated the beauty of this print—but luckily the PPA judges did.

some friendly conversation. You need a solid strategy for selling in order to make the big bucks. Consider the following as a starting point:

1. Determine which products you will be selling and decide which items will best suit the client's needs at each stage of the portrait life cycle (e.g., engagement sessions, wedding coverage, baby session, family portraits, etc.). This makes the sales process easier for the clients and the salesperson. It also helps create a demand.
2. Secondly, know who you want to sell each product to. You should not try to be everything to everyone all the time. Offer specific products to fill specific needs. Also, consider offering limited edition items throughout the year. This keeps clients excited and keeps them coming back for more.
3. Develop a strategy for how you will let each client know what you are promoting and selling. For instance, you may decide to promote your studio's offers and products via newsletters, direct mail, or other marketing efforts.
4. Create a marketing plan that allows you to keep in contact with your existing and prospective clients all year long. Analyze your progress and revise your marketing plan as needed. All too often, photographers operate their business without a yearly revised marketing and business plan. When you run your studio that way, it's as if you are throwing your business practices up against a wall and hoping some-

"Develop a strategy for letting each client know what you are promoting and selling."

I see that twinkle in your eye
and know some mischief you might try.
I'll watch you grow just like the moon
from slip to fullness, all in soon.

This 4x10-inch specialty frame by www.gw-moulding.com makes a fabulous limited-edition product. Consider offering it right before Mother's Day with a special poem for Mom!

High-school senior portrait studios should seem more contemporary and hip—and their images should be, too.

thing sticks. Your plan might work for a short period of time, but it won't work forever. A solid business and marketing plan helps you stay in control of your business and helps you identify the company's strengths and weaknesses. Remember, if you do not know the direction you are going, there is no way to get there. When you know where your business is headed, the journey is much more enjoyable!

5. Work to determine what qualities your studio environment should offer clients. Do you want your studio to appeal to your client's emotions? If so, you'll want to focus on all of the little things that further your emotional connection with your client. You'll need to ensure they have a high perceived value of your studio. Again, this means you'll need to pay attention to the details of the portrait experience that make the client feel pampered. If you wish to compete with high-

volume studios, you'll need to ensure that your products are priced in a way that appeals to a budget-conscious clientele.

6. Determine how national trends and opinions affect the product wants and needs of your client. Are there any photo trends that you should embrace to satisfy your target demographic? Do you need to update your equipment to remain competitive? Be sure to analyze these points on a yearly basis to determine how technical and environmental changes are affecting the bottom line of your business.

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE—This couple came to us several years ago to document their wedding. They flew our staff out to California to document their wedding, then flew to our studio in Florida so that we could capture maternity and newborn portraits. With the Customers for a Lifetime concept, we have been blessed with the ability to watch their family grow.

Make New Clients but Keep the Old

It is said that it costs twice as much to get a new customer as it does to retain an old one. Therefore, once you gain a customer, your goal should be to retain them for a lifetime. After years of focusing on our wedding photography studio, we turned our attention to portraiture. When we analyzed our business, we realized that we had conducted over five hundred weddings in the last decade and had only retained a small percentage of those clients! What was wrong? Were our customers leaving dissatisfied? What could we do to keep them coming back? After all, if we had forty weddings a year and only retained twenty of those clients, we should have twenty new portrait clients the following year and two hundred or more over the course of a decade. (*Note:* One of the great advantages of analyzing your retention numbers is it helps you in forecasting your budget for the following fiscal year.)

To create a loyal customer, you must make your clients feel that you take care of them and do not take them for granted.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated; 2005) defines "loyalty" as the act of being faithful to a cause, ideal, custom, institution, or product. The benefit to having a loyal customer is obvious. Once you have a loyal customer, their focus shifts away from price and even your competition, resulting in an increase in your per-session profits. But how does a studio create a steadfast allegiance?

To create a loyal customer, you must make your clients feel that you take care of them and do not take them for granted. Taking advantage of relationship marketing programs, offering customer-loyalty and gift-with-purchase incentives, and staying in touch with your clients regarding the goings on at your studio through regular e-mail newsletters are some of the strategies you can use to meet your clients' needs and make them feel well attended to. Remember, when you give back to others in the form of incentives or special offers, you show your appreciation for the investment they have made in your studio. We'll cover these aspects in greater detail later in this book.

You also need to cultivate their trust in you and your business. This means developing a bond, meeting your clients' needs, and creating portraits they can't live without.

3. Client Loyalty

Every business book will tell you, 80 percent of your business comes from 20 percent of your customers. So how do you maximize the sales from that 20 percent?

Clients want to feel special and appreciated. They want to know you care more about them than about yourself. If you do not return their calls right away, they will think they are not as important as whatever it is you are doing. If you do not celebrate with them when they welcome a new family member, they will feel as though you appreciate their money more than their family. Never forget how important it is to make people feel important. Creating effective relationship marketing programs, increasing your customer loyalty incentives, and providing rewarding gift-with-purchase opportunities will stimulate more frequent purchases and help you expand your customer base.

Relationship Marketing

Once you've formed an initial bond with your client, the first step to creating customer loyalty is to implement a solid relationship marketing program. A relationship marketing program is designed to improve relations with your customers and allows you to focus on retaining them rather than working to attract new customers.

Studio management software, such as Photo One, can help you track and manage your clients' behavior patterns and purchasing preferences.

Studio management software and other marketing technology available today can aid studio owners in tracking and analyzing client behavior patterns and individual preferences, allowing you to personalize your marketing efforts. For example, you can now easily send your client a card with one of their

Customer loyalty programs help ensure that clients will come back to you for all their portraits needs.

images on it, write a letter that is personalized with their name, and send an e-mail with their name and their children's names in the body. You can also nurture your relationship with existing clients by creating a blog. (For more on blogging, see chapter 7.)

This type of personalized attention is especially important today. With the convenience of the Internet, clients can now do a large portion of their shopping online. However, as you've likely experienced, there is not a lot of customer attention available for online shoppers. In this impersonal environment, retailers are unable to ask customers that fail to do repeat business about what it is that caused them to go elsewhere for their product and service needs.

Are you treating your online order clients with the same TLC as the ones who proof in your studio? Do they both receive the same thank-you cards and follow-up attention? If the answer is no, you must change your approach immediately; otherwise, your studio will be hit hard in the near future by the consequences of this inattention.

Loyalty Incentive Programs

This type of marketing program is designed to reward frequent and loyal customers. Remember, no matter how successful and sound your loyalty program may be, people are not loyal to your company, they are loyal to

you. It is the people who make up your company that keep your clients committed.

We have implemented two marketing programs that cater to the needs of two distinctly different client types: businesses and individuals. In the paragraphs that follow, you'll learn how each program works differently to ensure that our clients receive the personalized attention they need to feel cherished and reward us with their repeat business.

Preferred Business Passport. Recently, we implemented a Preferred Business Passport membership as a way to increase relationship marketing efforts with our commercial clients. We annually create PR images and photograph corporate events for several commercial clients. It was important to retain these clients because they are generally undemanding, and our associate photographers can easily create these images.

We initially contemplated sending out a form letter to our top commercial accounts. However, this approach would be impersonal. We realized that if we wanted to earn the company's loyalty, we had to touch people personally. Loyalty does not come from marketing, it comes from personally serving.

Avoid mass mailing letters and e-mails when attempting to build loyal relationships. Instead, send personalized marketing membership packets, make a personal phone call, or send a handwritten note. Identify the 20 percent of your clients who provide you with 80 percent of your business and personally and passionately work on building your relationship with them.

Program Details. This program was designed for our VIP commercial clients—the businesses and venders we prefer to work with. It offers a flat 5 percent off all products and services. Our goal was not to just hand this over to the person who contracted us to do the job. Rather, we wanted to have the company include this membership benefit in each employee's benefit package.

"Loyalty does not come from marketing, it comes from personally serving."

We have done a lot of advertising work with a cosmetic surgeon. He has the program listed on his benefits paperwork and promotes it to employees during the hiring process. We also work with an airline company that spends thousands of dollars with us annually to photograph their corporate parties. They promote this membership in their employee newsletter. Because of this promotion, we have attracted many of the airline's employees as customers for maternity sessions and family portraits, and have even made a wedding client.

If you are concerned that offering the 5 percent discount will result in a loss of revenue, you shouldn't be: the number of customers you gain and the increased advertising alone will be so much more substantial than the 5 percent discount. If need be, you could consider launching the program

Having an actual membership card increases the client's perception of the value of the program.

Analyze the companies you are loyal to and think about what it is about their membership programs that excites you and keeps you committed to their business.

in the beginning of the year and increasing your product pricing by 5 percent to compensate.

Lifetime Portrait Program. The second program is our Lifetime Portrait program. Most businesses today are using gift and loyalty cards to attract and keep customers. In addition, many businesses that once offered gift certificates are trading in paper gift certificates for plastic cards. One of the reasons is using gift cards instead of gift certificates means businesses no longer have to refund cash for unused balances. They simply keep the balance on the gift card. To studios, this means more positive cash flow and repeat business. Plastic cards are also great advertising tools because they are durable and are easily carried by your clients. Open your wallet. Which loyalty cards do you carry? Which ones are you more partial to? Which ones do you feel you benefit from the most? Do you stay loyal to that company? If so, why?

Program Details. This program is offered at our client's engagement portrait session. It allows members to come back to the studio at any time

FACING PAGE—From engagement portraits, to maternity images, to family portraits, the Lifetime Portrait program creates excitement and a relationship that lasts a lifetime.

Countering Concerns

Our clients are often pleasantly surprised by the benefits our Lifetime Portrait program. It is not uncommon to hear, "Are you telling me that if you were to photograph a bridal couple, then they had a family, then one of their children was to get married, you would do it for free?" Our response would be, "Yes; however, based on the type of event, the day of the event, and the coverage desired, they may have to commit to a premier bridal album." After all, if you were developing relationships with your clients and watching a baby grow from birth to marriage, would you not want to be a part of their special day?

We also get a number of questions about the Preferred Business Passport program. Photographers often ask, "Would you spend $500.00 making up gift/membership cards and marketing materials for a company with one hundred employees or more? Doesn't that get expensive, and isn't that expense a big risk if they don't use them?" We answer that it is an investment, but that we choose companies that have already spent at least $500.00 with us, so technically, we are already even. We ask, even if you hadn't made money off of the company this year but had a hundred employees as prospects and only ten of them used your services, what would the sales average be? Wouldn't it be greater than the $500.00 investment?

It's important to note that we categorize costs associated with the membership cards as an advertising expense. Sending personalized membership cards to a corporate client's one hundred employees can be much more effective and lucrative than putting an advertisement in a magazine or targeting a direct mail drop to one thousand people.

While any one of these approaches can be successful, combining your marketing efforts is the key to reaching your best profit levels.

The goal of this program is to create a strong customer loyalty and to track and increase retention.

Customers who purchase at the premier baby album level receive a membership in our Lifetime Portrait program.

and receive a complimentary portrait session—be it for a baby portrait, family portrait, or just because. Portrait dates, times, and locations are subject to availability. Depending on the type of portrait requested, the number of people being photographed, and the location desired, a minimum product purchase may be required. This program plants the seed that the client is hiring the studio to be more than just their engagement portrait photographer. Our clients hire our studio to photograph their family throughout their lifetime.

At our studio, the Lifetime Portrait program membership is awarded to clients in the following situations:

1. As an award to all bridal couples as part of the basic level of service when hiring the studio to photograph their wedding day.
2. As an award to VIP customers as a bonus or used as a barter service for business displays or other incentive for negotiations.
3. As a gift-with-purchase with the premier baby album level.
4. The program may be purchased by new clients for $1,450.00. (We have never sold it for that retail price. The price is listed to increase the perceived value of the product. However, we have found that most clients would rather spend that amount of money on portraits today and not toward a program that will benefit them tomorrow. We have, on the other hand, sold the program at a discount for $500.00 by offering a limited time special. This is great, because

when we run the special, we usually get clients referring other families into the program.)

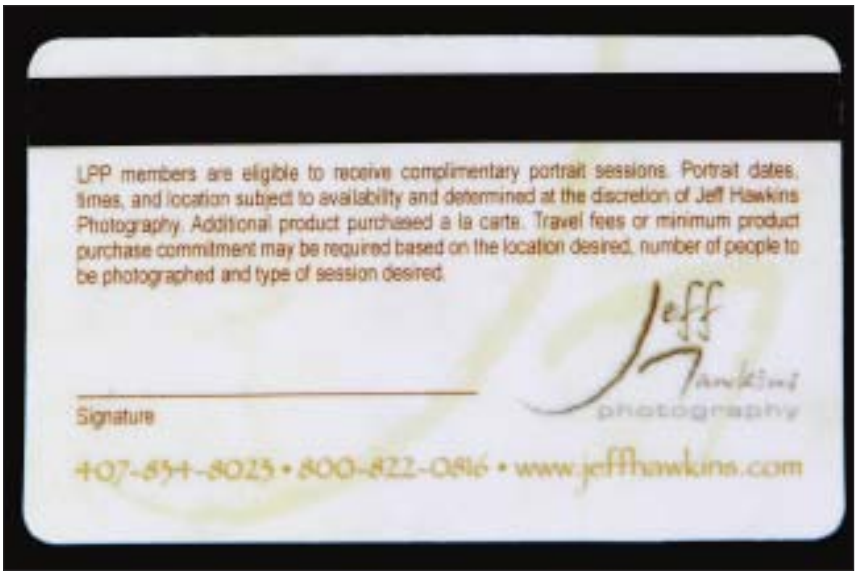
Consider creating "membership cards" using the gift cards available through Marathon Press (www.marathonpress.com) as a tool to help promote your portrait programs and build the perceived value of the membership. Be sure to purchase plastic cards rather than paper ones; the card should last for the length of the membership. (*Note:* Our membership cards are printed with the statement: "Portrait program is valid for the rest of your life or ours, whichever lasts longer!")

You will have the opportunity to personalize each card with a name. If you can order a large quantity with your clients' names on them, go for it! Don't be cheap. Another option is to have the cards printed with only a member number. You can then print a large quantity and keep them on hand to distribute to new members.

"As much as possible, you should avoid putting stipulations on the program."

Consider adding a black line on the back of the card so it appears as though it can be scanned. You don't necessarily need to spend the money to add a magnetic strip, but you do want clients to feel as if they have to carry the membership card in their wallet. Imagine having a client carry your phone number and web site address in their wallet for several decades! Also consider leaving a spot on the card so it can be signed like a credit card. Review other credit card, hotel, and airline reward programs and see what you like and dislike about their cards and programs.

As much as possible, you should avoid putting stipulations on the program. Each rule lowers the perceived value of the membership, and your goal is to get clients through your door. Think of it this way: if you had earned airline miles for using your credit card, and every time you at-


LPP members are eligible to receive complimentary portrait sessions. Portrait dates, times, and location subject to availability and determined at the discretion of Jeff Hawkins Photography. Additional product purchased a la carte. Travel fees or minimum product purchase commitment may be required based on the location desired, number of people to be photographed and type of session desired.
Signature
407-654-8025 • 800-822-0816 • www.jeffhawkins.com

Adding the look of a magnetic data strip on the back of your card makes it feel more important to clients.

Review other credit card, hotel, and airline reward programs and see what you like and dislike about their cards and programs. Then, implement these concepts in your studio's program.

tempted to redeem your miles, the flight was blocked, your loyalty to the airline would become increasingly diminished.

When running a portrait program that allows for no-cost portrait sessions, you must have faith in your portrait sales averages and know your profit is from the sale and not the session fee. After all, people usually do not like getting their portrait taken. To many, the experience is equal to going to the dentist.

At our studio, we only require a minimum purchase when we're conducting a session that requires us to go above and beyond the time and effort that our studio sessions usually require. For instance, a documentary session held at hospital, beach, or other tourist location may incur a minimum product purchase commitment. These sessions are typically held more than thirty miles from the studio and require two to three hours out of studio to produce—thus the reason why there is a minimum product

purchase commitment. However, Lifetime Portrait program members pay only a commitment toward the product; they do not pay travel fees or session fees for these sessions.

Be sure to spell out the portrait program membership guidelines on your contract, web site, brochures, and on the back of your membership card.

Gift-with-Purchase Products and Incentive Pricing

Your goal during the proofing phase should be to have the client regard you as a friend or an advisor who is helping them select the best portrait heirloom. When the client can forget that you are a salesperson, you will have mastered the art of a relationship-building proof session.

Setting up gift-with-purchase programs and incentive pricing can further your client's perception that you see them as a friend. These products and pricing structures are a simple way to thank your clients for choosing you to capture their milestone moments and special relationships. Never forget the importance of a thank you. It is an invaluable tool that should be used to show appreciation and continue to build your relationship.

Gift-with-purchase items can be promoted in monthly e-mail newsletters or on signage displayed in the studio. Some of the most effective gift-with-purchase options are items people can't get elsewhere. Consider using

The most lucrative part of the Signature Series books, besides increasing clients' perceived value of the packages, is that they can also be a wonderful form of advertising.

limited edition jewelry pieces (see www.vogelstudio.com), photo purses, or a deck of photo playing cards as a gift with a $1,000.00 purchase. The more exciting the free gift, the higher the pricing level the clients will rise to. This is a fabulous way to build your portrait sales average. For instance, when our studio initially started building our portrait business, we started with a portrait average of only $250.00. We created a gift-with-purchase incentive for building up to a $500.00 order. When our averages raised to $500.00, we raised the bar and offered a gift for clients who spent $750.00, and then $1,000.00, and so on.

Gift-with-purchase items can also encourage higher album sales. Many studios have found success using the Signature Series announcement books by Marathon Press as a fabulous gift with album purchase. It helps build the perceived value of the album purchase while taking the emphasis off the master file CD or DVD. This is a great benefit for portrait clients and studio owners alike.

"It doesn't do any good to make your portraits look better if no one sees them."

If using the Marathon Signature Series product, we recommend using the Signature Series announcements, not the gift books, as an incentive item. The announcements measure 4x4 inches, come with an envelope, and can be mailed for the cost of one stamp. Many photographers upgrade to the 5x5-inch book because the images appear larger and the representation of the images is thus somewhat better. However, it doesn't do any good to make your portraits look better if no one sees them. You want these in the hands of your customer's family members and friends within weeks of their special event or birth of their baby!

The big bonus with the Signature Series books is they make a tremendous promotional tool. The book can be designed with up to eight artfully mastered 4x4-inch pages. However, consider leaving the last page as your back copy page. Design a layout that includes your company name, logo, and web site and market to the client that the books come with seven artistically enhanced pages with up to ten artfully mastered images. (The number of images would be determined by the amount of text added.) Imagine getting the client excited about sending out 50, 100, 150, 300, or more booklets that showcase ten to twelve of your images and show your studio logo and web site. The response can be very powerful, and the advertising can't be beat!

If using a product like the Signature Series books as a gift-with-purchase product, consider creating a "HallMark" style page as the last page of your gift books. It makes for great advertising and if that is the way the books come, the clients won't question it.

Another way to create an incentive for your clients to spend more on their portrait purchase is to focus on selling packages rather than prints. If your portrait average is $250.00 and $175.00 of that covers the studio expenses and the cost of goods sold (often referred to as COGs, this is the amount that it costs to deliver a product being sold), then the profit from that sale is only $75.00. When you can tell clients that they will receive a free wall folio (with a $40.00 frame and a $10.00 print) with the purchase

Wall folios such as the one shown above make great gift-with-purchase items. Shop state photography conventions and look for discounted frames. Often, frame companies offer discounted prices and free shipping for trade show orders.

of $500.00 portrait package, the session fees and COGS will run $200.00 and the profit from the sale will increase to $250.00. If you can do that one hundred times a year (in other words, less than ten times a month), your profits will be $25,000.00!

The great thing about incentive pricing is the promotion will help make the sales for you. All you have to do is create the incentive and put a sign in your sales/proofing room. The customer will see the sign and keep track of the sales for you. If they are only $100.00 away from getting something for free, they will spend the extra $100.00 to get it, and all you will have to do is guide them through the process.

You want your clients to leave your studio with complete portrait products, not just prints. When a studio focuses on selling framed portraits, folios, and albums rather than just prints, they have more control over the presentation of their products. When framed prints leave your studio, they are to be displayed in your clients' homes, where they will serve as a form of advertising.

"The great thing about incentive pricing is the promotion will help make the sales for you."

Product Bundling

Fast food restaurants offer "value meals"—for instance, a burger, fries, and a large drink—for a price that falls below what the individual meal items would cost if purchased separately. This drives the restaurant's profits and appeals to consumers, who feel they are getting a lot of bang for the buck. In the studio, we call this technique product bundling, and it fuels the client's feeling that they are getting an unbeatable value at your studio. It also builds feelings of trust and loyalty that reinforce the client/photographer relationship.

Let's consider an example of how bundling works, so you can see how it is mutually beneficial to the client and studio. Pretend that you wish to show your client a 5x7-inch desk art frame. You most likely could purchase a well-made frame wholesale from a frame company for anywhere from $8.00 to $18.00. When it's all said and done, your wholesale price, including printing and labor, may be $25.00. However, no matter how great your work or the image might actually be, the value of the framed, unmatted print will not be $100.00 or more unless there is something unique about the framed print. The client will feel the weight and quality of the frame and know they can get a frame like that for $20.00 to $25.00. They will also consider that it will cost somewhere between 17 cents and $2.00 to have the image printed at a consumer lab. Though we studio owners know there may be a difference in our lab's print quality and the archivalness of the desk art frame, it could be hard to convince them that they should pay a substantially higher

"Bundling fuels the client's feeling that they are getting an unbeatable value."

Consider increasing the value of your smaller prints by showcasing them in desk art frames such as this one by www.gnpframes.com.

Clients are going to want to purchase smaller prints of their favorite images for some of their family members and friends, so why not encourage them to complete the sale with a desk art frame collection and help them make their gift giving easier?

price for these benefits. So how does the client formulate an assessment that because *you* clicked the button on the camera it is worth an additional $100.00 to $200.00? If you are a famously branded photographer, you may be able to get away with it, but that is not the case for most studio owners.

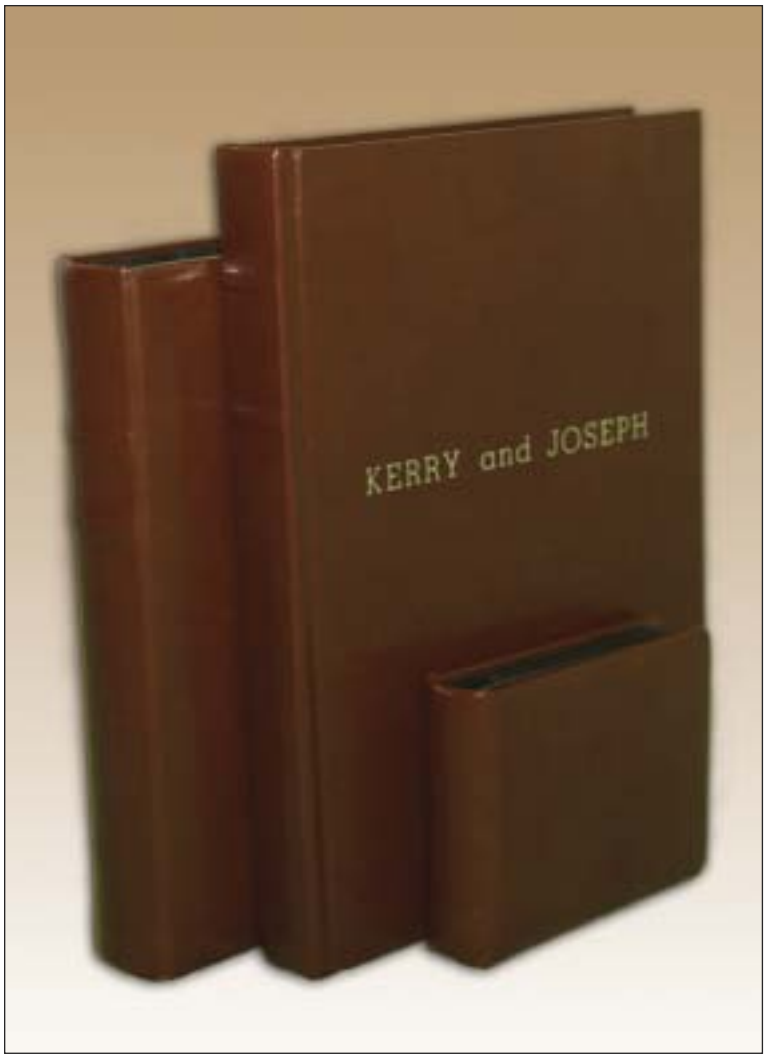
When you take a product with a lower perceived wholesale or retail cost and bundle it with other products, you increase the perception of the worth of these products and ultimately increase your studio's profits. For instance, rather than selling one framed 5x7-inch print at $100.00, you could sell them as a Buy 3, Get 1 Free promotion for $365.00. By doing so, your profit will go up by nearly $300.00, and your clients will leave feeling as though you are taking care of them rather than taking them for granted. By displaying the frames in your studio to keep clients interested, you may be able to purchase the frames in bulk at a discounted price, further increasing your profits.

"It costs more to attract a new client than to please and keep an existing one."

Using the tools and strategies outlined in this chapter will compel your clients to invest more money in your products and will keep them coming back for more. However, there is one more important factor to consider when you are striving to meet and exceed your clients' expectations: there are times when you may need to bend the rules a bit. For instance, if a client asks if you can ship their wedding album and your policy is to have the albums picked up at the studio, you may be inclined to tell them you'd be happy to do this and add the shipping and handling costs to their order. Consider, though, that by offering complimentary shipping the client will feel better about their experience with your company. Make a client feel special and appreciated and they will keep coming back as long as you have something new to offer them. Remember, it costs more to attract a new client than it does to please and keep an existing one.

4. Amplify Your Products

Heirloom albums have played a big role in preserving family memories. How will the fact that many of today's brides go without them alter family legacies in the years to come? Are we helping our clients or hindering the preservation of their memories?



Many studios have such similar photography styles and products that, in the consumer's eye, the only thing that differentiates one studio from the next is the studio's marketing. In this environment, it is hard to perpetuate the feeling that you have a distinct competitive advantage; it is challenging to stand out amongst your competition and separate your products or services by anything other than price. However, a smart studio owner knows how to create competitive advantages by creating standout products and increasing their focus on service.

As we have traveled around the nation consulting with other studio owners we have discovered that many studios are catering to "albumless brides" and are selling "productless portraits." Years ago, our studio and many others found success because we had the distinct ability to offer our clients more than images alone. Studios that once prided themselves in their ability to create standout albums and custom-framed images in award-winning styles now face the challenge of competing against businesspeople who are seeking to make an easy sale with quick captures and the release of master file DVDs or CDs.

Is this simply another shift in our industry, similar to the way cell phones impacted the communications industry or Microsoft's technology impacted the PC world? It is hard to speculate at this point in the journey, but one thing is certain: major corporations throughout the industry are ex-

amining the effects of these new trends and making changes in their businesses in order to stay strong.

No matter how these changes will affect our industry, we must ask, how is it affecting our customers? Over the last year, we have had several brides ask us to design an album for a wedding we did not even photograph! This trend would have been inconceivable just a few years ago. However, the brides' requests point to the fact that an interest in more than digital files and a high-quality heirloom product still exists. The couple might not fully realize this while they are still in the bridal budget mode and wedding planning stage. What they initially order might not be the product concept they originally wanted. So how does a studio determine what is the best product option and lead the clients to make that decision?

"So how does a studio determine what is the best product option?"

Product Options

To better understand the product options available, let us explore three product marketing concepts:

Basic Product. The basic product is one that is created as outlined in the contract (e.g., a master DVD with very large files and little to no artistic rendering done on the images).

A basic product like as a master DVD of images only may be a starting point in a client's mind.

Giving clients what you know they want and need is a safe way to increase your customer retention. It is better for them to leave your studio elated rather than disappointed.

Anticipated Product. The anticipated product is what the customer thinks they are purchasing. For instance, people buying personal computers for the first time expect them to come with a monitor (after all, how else would you *use* the computer?), but most do not. In our industry, many customers think they can create the same images you display in your gallery by taking the prints to their local twenty-four-hour lab and paying 17 cents for a print. These clients are most likely not educated on quality workmanship and the importance of an heirloom album, or they assume it will be easy to find and create one independently.

"The amplified product is created to give the customer maximum satisfaction."

Amplified Product. The amplified product is created to give the customer maximum satisfaction. In our industry, this would be the studio that focuses on a finished product for their clients but also appreciates the customer's desire to own their images for longevity's sake. Going back to the computer analogy, this would be a company that offered someone purchasing a computer a monitor, printer, some software, and even service help. After all, if a client needs all these things, not offering them may make acquiring the product less expensive, but in the end it will leave the customer feeling frustrated and unfulfilled.

Creating a Luxury Appeal

Many studios struggle with the idea of implementing an amplified product focus because they believe their demographic can't afford a luxury product. Though offering a higher-cost product does affect the perceived value of your products and your business identity, it is not the only factor in luxury perception. Consider implementing these practices to help create a luxury appeal:

1. Never underestimate your customers. Believe that they have the desire and the ability to upgrade to the next level. Women are the main marketing demographic of most studios. If you are a portrait photographer, you know that it is more often than not the mother who schedules the family portrait. With weddings, we all know the groom is just the prop. With commercial clients, it is often a female administrative assistant who begins the inquiry process. Well, news flash: when a woman wants something badly enough, she can find a way to make it happen. Believe it.
2. Create genuine benefits. Don't try to get by on brand recognition alone or deceive your clients by pretending what you offer is better if it is not. Also, focus on improving your talent and making your products technically and functionally more adept. Constant education is imperative when evolving your business. If you are not attending con-

Help your clients preserve their family heirloom by offering them more than they think they need and building the value of their heirloom products.

It's hard to avoid offering the same products as other studios—but you can outshine them when it comes to customer service.

ventions like PPA, WPPI, and NAPP and staying abreast of changes in the industry, it will be difficult for you to get ahead.

3. Deliver a flawless experience. It is difficult to always offer something your competition doesn't; it is only a matter of time before they catch up. However, you can always outshine the competition by implementing procedures that ensure a perfect studio and portrait session experience.
4. Think like your competition. Sure, we all love each other. This industry is an open and friendly one. However, top studios take the time to think like their competition. Study other studios (and other businesses in general) and incorporate any of those that will benefit your clients. Try to see your business from the outside in.

The bottom line is this: if you are working and making money, you own a business. Though you might want to pour all of your time and energies into your art, your clients expect you to show some business savvy and competency. If you elect to emphasize or offer only the basic or anticipated products in your studio, you may gain more clients initially, but you will retain fewer clients and will need to work harder to gain your overall market share. In an era when relationship marketing and customer service is the pulse of most successful businesses, making less, giving less, and doing less for your customers should not be an option. Help your clientele preserve their family heirloom. Amplify your products. If you don't give your clients what they are looking for, someone else will.

5. Lifetime Portraiture

Portraiture is definitely a family heirloom. Images of our loved ones, taken over the course of their lives, are priceless. As a studio owner, you know the importance of retaining a customer for a lifetime and the benefits of keeping them loyal to you and your business. However, to retain your clients, you must offer an array of products and services that will suit their needs and keep them coming back to you to capture milestones

FACING PAGE AND RIGHT—Capture each stage of your clients' relationships, from their engagement, to the wedding, to the birth of their children and the images they'll need as their family grows.

and special moments throughout their lifetime. In this chapter, we'll look at the sessions that are offered at our studio.

FACING PAGE—The Love Portrait session should be a fun experience for both the photographer and the couple. It is a great opportunity to get to know one another better prior to the wedding.

The Love Portrait

The Love Portrait can be created during any phase of a client's life. Though the portrait often serves as an engagement portrait, it can be an anniversary portrait or even part of a family portrait session. You might also consider offering your wedding clients a complimentary one-year anniversary portrait and a gift as a way to thank them for their business and encourage repeat business.

The Consultation. To ensure the best possible Love Portrait, you should discuss wardrobe and prop options in the pre-session consultation. Talk to the couple about the artistic vision for the portrait and discuss location options so that you can create a high-quality, meaningful environmental portrait.

Though it is best to conduct the pre-session consultation in the office, there are some clients who will not be able to attend. In this case, you should consider mailing a variation of the letter below. Note that you can also send the letter to clients who come in for a consultation; it will reinforce the concepts you discussed face to face.

> Hello! We are so excited to be working with you both! Thank you for considering our studio. We are sure you will be happy with your decision! The session is scheduled for _____. Please give us a call at 123-456-7890 or 800-123-4567 if you have any questions.
>
> *Engagement Session Tips*
>
> **1.** Choose outfits that fit your personality and make you feel attractive. Make sure you create color harmony and both outfits coordinate well together. Avoid heavy patterns or stripes. Solid, neutral colors look best. Please avoid wearing short skirts or shorts. This makes posing more difficult. Long, flowing dresses, jeans, or khakis make better selections.
> **2.** Start thinking about props; they can make your photograph unique. Consider a picnic basket, wine glasses, a musical instrument, or even pets. We can also work with larger objects such as boats, sport cars, planes, or motorcycles.
> **3.** Don't worry about the location! Once you choose your wardrobe and props, schedule your appointment and we will discuss locations and times with you. We have access to many secret hideaways . . . just tell us what you envision and we will create the rest!
> **4.** Become alert to interesting photographs. Look out for romantic postcards or magazine advertisements. Often we re-create art with you as the subject!

5. Keep in mind, many couples choose to display their Love Portrait at their reception. Consider displaying the image in a Signature frame, using the image on your wedding invitations, or presenting framed portraits as bridal party or parent gifts.
6. Finally, consider bringing a sister, brother, or friend along to the session. We can just as easily do two or three sittings at the same time as one! Give Mom the family portrait she has been wanting. Please discuss this option when scheduling your session.
7. Have fun! Let us capture you being you!

Remember, photography is not expensive, it is priceless! You will surely cherish this family heirloom for a lifetime! Again, thank you for considering Yourtown Photography studio.

Best wishes,
Jane Doe
Yourtown Photography

FACING PAGE—Try to get a feel from the couple to see how much fun they are willing to have. Capturing some wild images like piggyback rides or jumping in the air can make them more relaxed to do the more romantic images for you.

BELOW—Encourage your clients not to worry about location. Let them know, you have access to many secret hideaways where the lighting may be more appropriate.

Location. When capturing a Love Portrait, try to conduct the sessions environmentally. This allows the couple to be more relaxed. Don't spend a lot of time posing the couple; instead, focus on capturing fun, romantic im-

ages. Though you will need to capture some of the traditional "mom shots," the session should be casual and fun. Ask the couple to dance, give each other piggyback rides, or race—whatever it takes to create a natural smile and bring the couple's personality into the image.

Here are some tips for creating great environmental portraits:

- The background is not as relevant as you might think. Put the focus on the subjects and not on the backgrounds.
- Use a long lens (e.g., 70–200 IS f/2.8) and shoot with the aperture wide open. Limited depth of field is the key.
- Use open sky as your main light, but avoid the harsh, overhead light of midday.
- Limit the use of on-camera flash. Have an assistant available to introduce off-camera flash or use a reflector to produce a softer quality of light on the subjects and fill in shadows.

A "mom shot" (a more traditional portrait in which the couple is looking at the camera) is a vital part of every Love Portrait session. The image will be perfect for newspaper announcements and will make a great gift for parents and grandparents.

ABOVE—The key to the guest book sale is capturing a variety of great images during the session. When the clients fall in love with multiple images and feel compelled to choose a pose besides the one they selected for their Signature frame, you can sell them on using other images in the guest book.

RIGHT—Encourage your clients to use a gold, silver, or bronze acid-free gel pen when signing the guest book.

Guest Books. A designer guest book is the most lucrative product option we offer to our Love Portrait clients. This book will showcase a variety of images from the session and can be put on display at the event where it can be viewed and signed by attendees. With the personalized wishes from friends and family members, in addition to the beautiful images, many of our clients find it makes a great coffee-table book. A more traditional guest book is often relegated to a storage box.

To make the guest book a great seller, you have to be excited to sell it. Introduce the product at your first meeting and immediately begin to sell the client on its benefits. When clients view their images at the proofing session and find it impossible to part with your great shots, you can easily

expand the sale by recommending they purchase more than just the pose that will be used in the Signature frame.

Our two favorite guest books, which we display and discuss with clients from the beginning of the Love Portrait pre-session consultation, are:

Leather Craftsman 3500 Album. This 10x7-inch guest book is a high-end product with digitally designed prints supplied to the company by the studio. You can view the guest book at www.leathercraftsmen.com/guestbook.html.

Seldex Gallery Album. This 9-inch guest book's low wholesale price means a little less cost to the photographer and still creates an impressive presentation for your guests to see at an event. You can view the guest book at www.finaoonline.com.

When the product is delivered, we offer the following handling and presentation guidelines:

- Purchase a gold, silver, or bronze acid-free gel pen so the guest book can be signed by your family members and friends. These pens can be purchased from an art supply store. It's a good idea to purchase two or three pens in case one disappears.
- Purchase velum or rice paper to place between the pages while the ink is drying. This will prevent ink from transferring onto your images. The paper can be removed once the ink is dry.
- Be sure to bring the guest book to the rehearsal dinner and have family members and friends sign it at that time. They will be too busy to sign it on the day of the wedding, and this early opportunity to sign means they will get the best spaces in the book.
- Appoint someone to monitor the signing of the guest book. This will prevent too many signatures on one page and not enough on another or in an area of the book where doodling is undesirable. Also, decide whether you want a message and a salutation written, or a salutation only. Give these instructions to the person monitoring the book to make sure the pages do not become too cluttered. If you are expecting over three hundred guests, consider having us design the book with lines added on the facing page like a traditional guest book.
- Enjoy your book for years to come! Remember, when it is time to start a family, these books are perfect for baby showers, graduation, and anniversary parties!

ABOVE—When we say "assume the position," clients know to stand side by side, with one arm behind their partner, and hold hands in the front.

FACING PAGE—Teaching your clients how to "assume the position" will make capturing their formal bridal portraits on the wedding day faster and more efficient, no matter what angle the image is captured from.

Key Phrases

During the Love Portrait session, we introduce our clients to some phrases that encourage the desired portrait look. The following are some of the directives and phrases used to guide the posing of our clients.

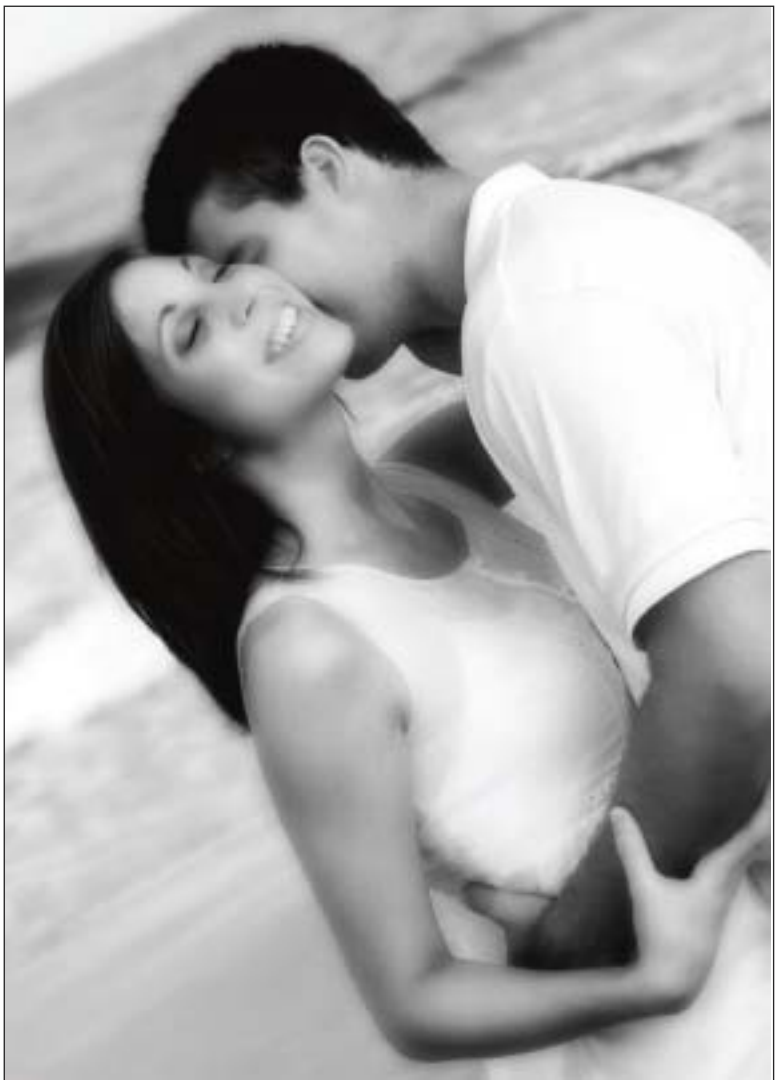
Assume the Position. This classic "mom shot" pose is a great basis for full length, three-quarter length, and even close-up poses. Have the cou-

ple stand with their arms behind each other's back, turn slightly toward each other, hold hands in the front, and look at the camera. This pose is a must to learn, and if your clients remember this position the day of the wedding it will expedite the posed formals and help them get into the reception and join their friends faster!

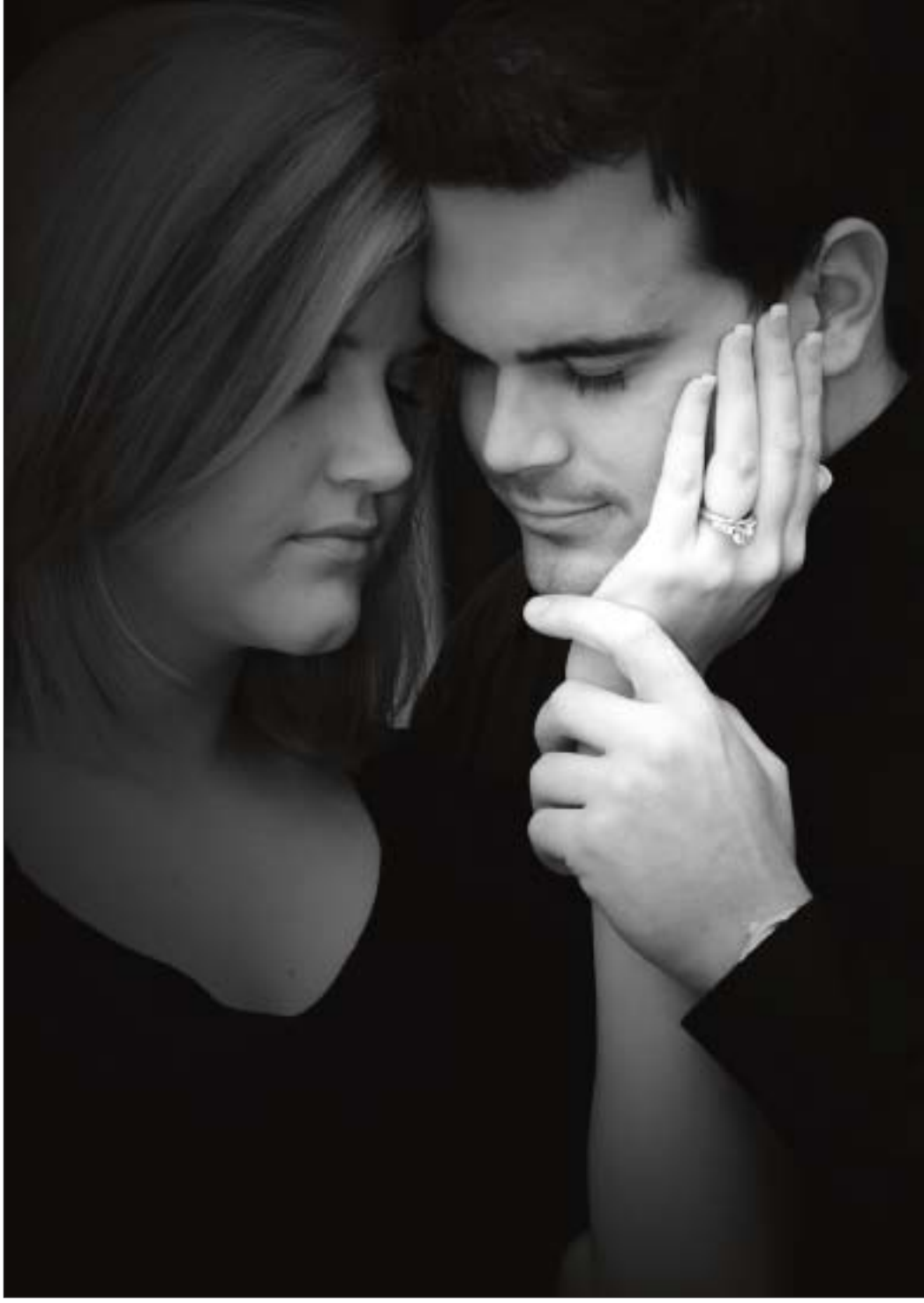
The Turtle. When you tell your clients to "turtle," you are telling them to stretch out their necks out and stick out their chins to make their faces appear less full and avoid the shadowing of a double chin. When the couple learns this technique during the Love Portrait session, you don't need to publically embarrass them on their special day by telling them you need to pose them in a way that hides a double chin. Telling the client, "Don't forget to turtle!" is a simple solution for addressing the problem discretely and with tact.

Shift Your Weight. This is another key phrase that can really help flatter a couple's appearance in their portraits. Some people have a very difficult time learning how to shift their weight away from the camera, and it may take some practice. The Love Portrait session allows you that time to practice this, if needed, without slowing down the portraits the day of the event.

The Vampire. The vampire is one of our studio's signature poses that we utilize for the Love Portrait and the wedding day images. This pose helps us to create a consistent, branded look. The man dips the woman



The vampire pose is a very romantic image that couples just love!



Regardless of whether it is a Love Portrait or a wedding image, the ring shot is a classic image that stands out in the album every time.

back while pulling her toward his waist and then gently leans in to kiss or nibble on her neck.

The Ring Shot

The ring shot is another one of our studio's signature poses. Typically, this image is the final shot in the wedding album and the guest book. For the ring shot, you should have the bride lean into her significant other and place her left hand on his cheek. Make sure her elbow is tucked in toward his chest, not aimed toward the camera. He should delicately place his left hand on her arm. The image is most romantic when both subjects have

Artfully mastering any image (above) will help take the portrait to the next level and add the moodiness and romantic feel the couples desire (facing page).

their eyes closed and the portrait is captured in black & white (or converted to black & white in postproduction).

Maternity and Baby Portraiture

After the Love Portrait and wedding, the next milestone event in a couple's life will likely be the baby phase! The first year of a child's life, the baby changes drastically. Capturing this progression is vital, and to truly document the client's/family's life cycle, you should begin with a maternity session.

Maternity Portraits. Whether in person, over the phone, or in a written e-mail or letter, coach the mother on how best to prepare for her session. The maternity session should be conducted in-studio, where lighting can be controlled and distracting elements can be avoided. Maternity sessions should be held between the sixth and ninth month of pregnancy, and mothers should be informed not to worry about imperfections, stretch marks, or other personal concerns that stem from a pregnancy. Assure your

Pregnancy is one of the most beautiful times in a woman's life. Capturing it is a blessing, so cherish the opportunity.

client that most of your subjects have imperfections that are artfully retouched before the images are delivered. Encourage Mom to bring a cute button-down solid color maternity top, preferably in white, brown, or black, or lingerie that makes her feel attractive. Boy shorts, lacy bra tops, or long see-through robes always make for beautiful portraits. Suggest that the father and maybe the baby's brothers and sisters tag along—they all make great additions to the session.

Most of our new parents elect to purchase our narrative baby album—a coffee-table book that showcases a variety of portraits taken over the course of the baby's first year. With this style of album, you will want to showcase a combination of posed portrait images and documentary style portraits. The narrative baby album is awesome because it begins the documentation of the life cycle of the baby. With this style of album, couples usually break down the total cost over the course of a year, making a payment with each session. The more flexible you can be with payment options, the more the customer will spend and the more likely they will be to return to your studio for future sessions.

"Most of our new parents elect to purchase our narrative baby album."

Many of our maternity clients have opted to purchase a guest book album for their friends and family to sign during their baby shower or as a pregnancy journal to share with their baby one day. See pages 59–66 for more information on our guest books.

Since most maternity portraits are considered intimate images, you should never photograph your client alone. Be sure to work with an assistant or make certain someone else (her husband, friend, or a family member) is present in the studio. Use sheer fabrics like those available from www.coleandcompany.com to wrap the subject in and to create an elegant,

FACING PAGE—Our Can you Hear Me Now? portraits focus on the father-to-be.

LEFT—When working with a smaller studio space or lower ceilings, consider recessing the hair light to give you more room to work with clients.

Our Bear Hug portraits show the mom and dad with their arms meeting around her belly.

soft background. Also consider having available a variety of maternity tops and skirts available to supplement the wardrobe the client might have brought with her.

Be sure to analyze the mom's comfort level to determine what poses you will be able to do during the session. Again, use signature poses to create a branded look.

Some of our most popular signature maternity portraits include:

Can You Hear Me Now? In this portrait, the focus is on the father-to-be. The portrait beautifully juxtaposes the masculinity of the father's face

with the beauty of the mother's belly. It can be showcased in any color variation (color, black & white, sepia, etc.) and usually photographs best when the father is wearing a black long-sleeve shirt or no shirt at all.

Bear Hug. This is a romantic pose that shows the mother and father with their hands meeting on the belly. Because of the angle of the pose, this image works best when the mother is wearing a maternity top or bra top.

Sitting Solitude. This is a "quiet" portrait intended to show the mother reflecting on the thoughts that must be racing through her mind—the excitement, joy, and fear. Ask the mother to give you a serene expression and

Our Sitting Solitude portraits concentrate on the mother's emotions.

FACING PAGE—Our Belly Basics portraits (top left) are simple and classic. One of our clients' favorite portraits is The Angel (top right). Our Sibling Support portraits (bottom) are a great family-oriented addition to the baby book.

to close her eyes. Use a hair light or kicker light to accentuate the dramatic mood of the image.

Belly Basics. This is a simple classic maternity portrait image, where you focus in on the side-angle view of the belly. To capture this image, create a silhouette or light from the side with a kicker light.

The Angel. This is one of our clients' favorite signature poses. They love the flowing fabric and the feeling of being hugely pregnant yet amazingly dainty all at the same time. Be advised that not all clients can re-create this pose. Some clients just can't move that delicately, especially if they are nearing the final month of pregnancy.

Sibling Support. This is a classic family-oriented pose that makes for a great addition to the baby book. Encourage the subjects to wear black long-sleeved shirts to create contrast and put the focus on the baby.

Newborn to Three-Month-Olds. It should be your goal to book the newborn session as early as possible—definitely by the six- to eight-week mark of the baby's life. A newborn's appearance changes so dramatically

The earlier you can capture the newborn's portrait, the better. You want their little feet to be as close as possible to the size they were on the day they were born. This will help the parents to remember how tiny their baby once was.

every three months, you want to be sure to catch the natural beauty and delicate features while you can.

You should coach the new mom on how to plan for the newborn session just as you would to prepare her for any other portrait session. Newborn sessions should take place in-studio to ensure an inviting, comfortable atmosphere for the baby. The smaller space is less intimidating to a newborn than an environmental location, and the controlled lighting available in the studio will help ensure a great portrait.

"Coach the new mom on how to plan for the newborn session."

Newborn sessions should be captured on a black, white, or pastel pink or blue background. Use the same type of fabric you use for the maternity session (e.g., fabrics from www.coleandcompany.com) to soften the background and to create a more artistic image of the child. Unless the clients want the infant photographed in an heirloom outfit that is important to the family, the newborn child should always be

FACING PAGE—Use the same fabric you use for your maternity sessions to create a more artistic image of the newborn baby.

LEFT—Be sure to advise the parents to plan on being a part of the newborn's portrait, even if they do not fully appear in the image.

photographed nude. Adding clothing tends to detract from the beauty and charm of their tiny bodies.

The photographer should avoid adding props at this stage of the child's life, unless the prop is a parent. Mom and Dad should be instructed to come dressed in long-sleeved black shirts and black pants. This contrast makes for great portraits and puts the focus on the tiny features of the child. Tell the parents they should be prepared to use part of themselves (e.g., a hand) in the portrait—even if they don't want to be in the image. The baby will probably find comfort in the closeness of a loved one.

Always allow plenty of time to capture the session. If needed, allow for a break so the mother can feed the baby. A full tummy may help the baby sleep, and a sleeping baby is a cooperative subject! (*Hint:* Keeping a naked baby warm will help them sleep and be more relaxed for the session, so turn off the air conditioning for these sessions.)

When capturing these images, be sure you know what you are going to capture and at what age you are going to capture it. Too often, studios try to do everything in one session—but if you do, why should the client

Creating a variety of portrait looks, like these newborn images incorporating fabric, keeps the client coming back for new images.

Signature Series books make great baby announcements. Consider adding them as a gift-with-purchase or as an incentive to order a baby album.

bother to come back for more portraits? Have specific poses planned for each age category and market only those images to the family. Adhering to this plan will allow you to achieve two important objectives: (1) the promise of the new and exciting images will create a demand for additional sessions and keep clients coming back; and (2) by producing the same images for all of the clients in a single portrait stage you will create a body of work with a branded look.

Follow these simple guidelines for priceless newborn portraiture:

1. Use fabric to soften the background and increase the artistic appeal of the portrait.
2. Get the baby naked to emphasize their tiny body parts.
3. Create a parental connection: bring the family together.
4. Remember that parents make the best props. Use their hands, rings, feet, and shoulders.
5. Make the newborn the angels you want them to be. Add a simple floral halo and some tulle and you have a great portrait of the family's precious little gift from heaven!

Marketing. Offering this early portrait session can be a big advantage for your studio. Many franchised studios found in malls or in popular baby stores do not offer portraits of babies three months old or younger. Your ability to offer this service will prove to be a great advantage that will allow you to increase your baby album sales.

Baby's First Year Albums. The most popular product for a newborn portrait is the Baby's First Year narrative album. By producing the images at multiple sessions that span the baby's first year, you will find that you can command the same profits as you would for a wedding shoot—without the ten-hour day and the stress from Bridezilla! These books have gotten rave reviews and have earned us a lot of referrals.

"You will find that you can command the same profits as for a wedding shoot."

Three- to Six-Month-Olds. This is the session that follows the newborn session. Again, do not try to capture every conceivable image in this one session. You want to have specific poses planned for the newborn, three- to six-month, nine month, and one-year sessions. This keeps your photographer focused; he or she will know what type of photos should be captured at each session and, armed with this knowledge, will be able to better coach the clients during the session.

The three-month session is also conducted in-studio. The studio is a controlled environment, and with the baby more aware of their surroundings at this age, keeping distractions at a minimum is important. This portraits should be captured with the baby naked, unless a parent brings a baptism or christening outfit or an heirloom outfit. In such a case, the

wardrobe should be simple and not distracting. Parents should also come prepared to be used as a prop for the session. They should wear a black, long-sleeved shirt and black pants or, if the image will be high key, all white clothing.

Nine Ways to Say I Love You. The most popular product for parents of a baby in this age group is the Nine Ways to Say I Love You series. This series features cute images of the hands, feet, bottom, nose, ears, etc. At this stage, the babies are not as wrinkled or alien-like as they are when they are newborns. These tiny features are important to capture, because these

Nine Ways to Say I Love You is the most popular product sold to parents of our three- to six-month-old portrait clients.

Parents should plan to be part of the session at this age. Often, the closeness can bring comfort to the child.

little ones are beginning to grow into their bodies and features. These images are showcased in a narrative baby album or in a Baby Parts frame.

At this age, the child will most likely not be able to sit up by themselves and will need support. When a parent is not included in the frame and used as a posing aid, you can use any of the posing pillows and other support options offered by photographic prop companies. (You can often find these items on display at trade shows.) However, those can be quite pricey. A boppy or a bouncer (available at your local baby store) can be purchased for about a half of what you would pay for one of the industry-specific props. Consider purchasing a bouncer with batteries, which will vibrate delicately enough to calm a child but not enough to make an image out of focus.

Regardless of how you pose a three-month-old, once a baby starts to become active, it is important you work with a faster shutter speed. It is also equally important that you don't spend time messing with equipment but instead focus on the quick capture of the fleeting expressions of the baby.

Six- to Nine-Month-Olds. This session can be conducted in-studio, in the client's home, or even outdoors. At this stage, the baby will most likely

be able to sit up by themselves and will be developing more of a personality. Ideally, you should photograph this child in a controlled environment, such as in the studio. However, if need be, they are old enough to sit outdoors for a session.

During this session, you can begin adding wardrobe, accessories, and props. Add accessories such as bonnets for girls and hats for boys. They are beginning to change from babies into little children at this stage, so anything that will reflect that growth makes for a good accessory. Props and accessories should show or bring out their personality. As was the case with the three- to six-month-old session, parents make the best props for this age group. Your child standing up holding on to your leg or your hand or leaning on your shoulder is symbolic of the love between a parent and a

"Anything that will reflect that growth makes for a good accessory."

Often at this stage, you will need to incorporate a prop that helps the young subject sit upright. Have the parents close by in case the child starts to take a tumble.

Props and accessories should show or bring out the child's personality at this stage.

child. You will need to look for items for them to sit in that will help them be independent of their parents, but also stable. As for wardrobe, jeans, overalls, and dresses always make cute attire. Remember, solid, neutral colors photograph best.

Photographically, keep the lighting simple whether in-studio or on location. Use a higher shutter speed and f-stop to capture a fast-moving child. To get the best reactions at this age, have the parent or your assistant talk to them, play games with them, or read them a story. Having parents involved can often be helpful, but remember to keep control of the session. Don't let the parents and other observers run the session.

Keep in mind that a child may be very distracted by other people in the studio. If their presence seems to distract the child or cause anxiety, don't

The What's in a Name panel is a very popular choice among the parents of six- to nine-month-old babies. It is a great way to showcase their little one's newfound independent personality!

be afraid to ask some of them to leave the studio area. (A word of caution: don't send everyone out of the room. It is better for you and the child to make sure one guardian is present at all times.) Often props will help keep the child focused, but don't spend a lot of time on one idea; if it isn't working, move on to the next option. The child's attention span will be shorter once they become bored.

Unfortunately, because these subjects are so young, there will not be a lot of specific poses for this age range that you will market to create the branded look. You will need to rely on wardrobe and expressions to create a unique image.

Keep in mind that although subjects closer to the six-month mark may need the support of a chair or a posing pillow to sit upright, this will usually be the first portrait of the child sitting up on their own. Encourage the parents to consider bringing their own props that can be used to stabilize the baby. Objects like bassinets, baskets, big flower pots, cooking pans, or a bird bath can be used to help the subject sit upright and can personalize the image, make the child smile, and make for a fun portrait.

"Encourage the parents to bring their own props to stabilize the baby."

This will also most likely be the first professional portrait of the baby's personality shining through. Capture all the expressions you can—happy, sad, frustrated, or glad, you name it. Get down on their level and work fast. You'll want to be sure to capture all of the changing expressions.

Because the six- to nine-month-old session does not fulfill any specific product need for the family, you should encourage parents of babies in this age group to come into the studio by offering a limited edition product. The product we promote to clients who book this session is the What's in a Name panel. Each one is uniquely designed with images from the six- to nine-month session and showcases the child's name. At our studio, this

product is only available at this session unless we have a limited-time portrait promotion where we market it to all customers. When you tell a client that a particular product is only available for that session but that you'll let them know when you offer the promotion to the general public, you build the perceived value and encourage a sale.

Consider designing the What's in a Name panel as an 8x20-inch image and perhaps selling one panel for $275.00 or two panels for $450.00. The cost for creating two panels is not significantly higher than it is for one (you are paying for a 16x20-inch print and cutting it in half, and the labor would be the same because the second panel matches the first), so the profit for selling two panels is substantial!

One-Year-Olds. We call this the I Am Free session! By this age, the child is likely walking on their own, and it is important to let them wander free. It's a good idea to conduct the session environmentally. If possible, offer to do the session at the child's first birthday party or in their home. If the client is a Lifetime Portrait Program member, implement a minimum product purchase commitment to cover the travel charge and cost of your time capturing the session. If the client is purchasing a baby

Let the one-year-old wander free and be as independent as they desire to be!

Give a Reminder

At the end of the first year, if the client has missed any of the stages described in this chapter, remind them that now would be the time to schedule a session before their child passes the baby stage.

album, instead of charging them to capture these images consider adding the travel cost to the album price. That way, you can justify doing one session at their location and build a more complete heirloom album.

The walking one-year-old will strive to be independent, and you will likely capture the best portraits at a park, playground, beach, or even in his own backyard. As with the engagement images, when photographing environmentally, place the focus on the subjects, not the backgrounds. When capturing outdoor portraits of a one-year-old, limit the depth of field and use the open sky as your main light. You should avoid photographing the subject when they are facing the camera and the sun is falling on them. Also avoid or limit the use of on-camera flash and have an assistant introduce off-camera flash or a reflector when required. Select a long lens (e.g., 70–200 IS f/2.8) and use it wide open. This will give the child the freedom they desire but will allow you to get as close as you want. Keep in mind that these newly mobile subjects will not stay put, so be ready to capture fast. Limit the amount of equipment you use and do not spend time looking at the LCD or playing with your camera's settings.

"You will likely capture the best portraits at a park, playground, or in his own backyard."

Parents spend a lot of money and time decorating a baby's room. Images of the room should be included in the album, if possible. It is also important to capture documentary style images that showcase the child's favorite toys and play area. Another popular subject for this milestone birthday is bath time.

The narrative album, custom-framed portraits, and Signature Series thank-you birthday cards are very popular with the parents of the one-year-old. Encouraging the parents to hang a one-year portrait in the child's room is usually a winner. We suggest having all of your 11x14-inch and larger prints delivered as a custom-framed portrait. This gives you control over the way the images are showcased and may allow you to guarantee an archival product. A portrait from the desk art collection makes a great gift for grandparents, family members, or friends, and using the bundling approach to add on these items is a profitable solution (see page 45 for product information).

Limited Edition or Themed Portrait Sessions

Once a client's child hits the one-year mark, the studio must find new ways to entice families to come back each year for more than just a holiday por-

trait. Without such a strategy, you'll find yourself extremely busy in November and December but your studio will be dead throughout the rest of the year—and most studios can't make sufficient profit in two months' time to justify lying low for the remaining ten months of the year. Therefore, marketing limited edition or themed portrait sessions will help keep your clients walking through your door. Such sessions create a sense of urgency that can translate into big sales.

"Encourage your customers to make multiple purchases over the course of the year."

By carefully scheduling a variety of limited edition portrait sessions, you can encourage your customers to make multiple purchases over the course of the year. You will also find that they can help your studio build brand recognition.

There are many studio owners who find great success in creating quality limited edition and themed portraiture. Photographers Cindy Baxter, Lisa Jane, and Vicki Taufer are just a few of the industry leaders in this area. There are many fabulous speakers who are happy to share their great theme portrait ideas in lectures conducted across the country.

Opportunities for themed and limited edition portraits are endless. Try studying well-known art work to come up with new ideas. Ask the background artist you work with to get creative as well and see what they can suggest. You never know what a Norman Rockwell or a Thomas Kinkade print can inspire in you. It may be a cottage or a scenic background, or the wardrobe the person was wearing in the painting. Any of these characteristics can spark an idea for a fabulous new portrait creation.

You don't need a huge studio space to conduct theme portraits. Consider having professionally built cabinets to store your wardrobe and fabrics and make your studio appear less cluttered.

A word of caution: try not to purchase your studio's wardrobe and props solely through the trade show vendors. Though we love them dearly and would love to give them all our business, we have found that the outfits and props they offer can be quite expensive. Also, you will want to avoid purchasing the same props and clothing used by your competition. Use your creativity and shop online and at children's clothing stores and craft stores. This may help to trim your theme portrait budget and can ensure that your sets and portraits are unique. If you can't find the wardrobe you are searching for at a children's clothing store, think about teaming up with a local seamstress. You might see if you can barter with her—her services for your sessions or a special portrait, for instance.

"Use your creativity and shop online and at children's clothing stores and craft stores."

Some of the most popular limited edition portrait themes we have found are: The Day with the Ducklings, Bunny Portraits, Dickens' Christmas, White Christmas, Father Christmas, Furry Friends, Fairytale Portraits,

LEFT—Our Take Me Out to the Ball Game portraits are popular with clients when it comes to purchasing a gift for Father's Day.

FACING PAGE—Our limited edition Dickens' Christmas portraits are popular with clients and help boost profits during the holidays.

Take Me Out to the Ball Game, A "Par"fect Golf Portrait, Gone Fishing, and Baby Ballerinas. We have found that offering themed limited edition portraits once a year creates more of a demand for these sessions.

The following are some tips for creating successful Limited Edition Portrait Sessions:

1. Select a new theme at least once a quarter or every other month. Add these themes to your marketing plan so you know what you will be doing in the beginning of the year and can promote the dates throughout the year.
2. Add limited edition portraits to your calendar and also on your web site. Consider making promotional calendars, complete with notes regarding the dates of your limited edition promos so clients know in

For sets that require lots of foliage, contact a wholesale greenery rental company (ask a florist for a referral). Such a company that can provide you with lots of trees, ferns, and other greenery. We only needed to use their creative expertise once to know exactly what we needed to purchase, how many of each item, and where to put them all. Let them come in and set it up once. If you can afford it, do it again. If not, learn, take notes, and then buy your own. If possible, purchase the trees and plants, then plant them on your studio property when the themed portrait session changes or donate them to someone else. Often buying plants and trees costs as much as renting!

advance when they will be coming. Send direct mail cards at least three times prior to the session over a six- to eight-week period and e-mail newsletters using an HTML service and tracking software. (See chapter 7 for more information.)

3. Make your themed portraits available for a limited time only, and make no exceptions. This will create a demand with your clients. If you make an exception now, they will know you are not serious about your deadlines when it comes to the next themed portrait session.
4. Offer a unique gift-with-purchase incentive or a limited edition product that is only available with that themed portrait session. For instance, the Take Me Out to the Ball Game session, which we run before Father's Day, may come with a deck of complimentary playing cards printed with an image from the session. The wholesale cost for this gift-with-purchase is minimal, but the thank you to the client is worth so much more. You may also consider adding a portrait money clip to your price list for clients attending this session. The product

Take an image like this and have it printed on a deck of playing cards. Dad would love it for Father's Day, and it makes a great gift-with-purchase that can be used to thank clients for doing business with you.

makes for a unique Father's Day gift that is only available for purchase from your studio with this session.

5. Your studio does not have to be large to successfully conduct these sessions. Our studio space held us back for many years before we had the courage to try the themed portrait sessions that other studios were so successfully creating. You don't need much space, and if organized correctly, storage is easy.

Getaway Sessions

For years, clients would contact our studio and ask for a beach portrait. Due to the fact that we were located an hour to an hour and a half away from a beach, we would typically charge our normal sitting fee and then tack on a hefty travel charge to compensate us for the travel expense and time away from the studio. We soon realized that these fees encouraged our clients to select a photographer with a studio that was located at their destination.

A Getaway session is an on-location portrait session at which several families are photographed one after the other. Grouping these location sessions inn this way allowed us to avoid passing on hefty travel fees to our clients.

Encourage your clients to bring along other family members to their Getaway session. You should be able to do two or three sessions as easily as you can do one in the forty-five minutes that are allotted, and this way you can meet new clients and increase your sales opportunities.

We found, in conducting some of these sessions, that we tended to sell larger portraits and gain a higher amount of revenue when conducting portrait sessions at a beach, park, or garden. Of course, we decided to rethink our strategy and came up with the idea of offering Getaway sessions, environmental portrait sessions held within a thirty-mile radius of our studio.

To cut the costs and time spent traveling to and from various locations, we opted to set a date, time, and location for a single Getaway session and to absorb the costs we used to charge our location clients. We promote the sessions several weeks in advance via e-mail newsletters, direct mail, and word of mouth. The first ten families to sign up get to take advantage of the offer. We hold these sessions back to back, approximately forty-five minutes apart. We stress the importance of arriving early to keep sessions on track and even encourage the client to bring a friend or family member and share their forty-five minute session with no additional charge. This helps build referrals. Typically, Getaway sessions are held once a quarter, over a weekend. You can run this promotion as often as you desire—or whenever you need a beach vacation!

"Run this promotion as often as you desire—or whenever you need a beach vacation!"

With Getaway sessions, get creative with locations. You would be surprised at how far people are willing to travel for a creative portrait session opportunity. Our engagement couples are usually willing to drive the farthest to document their love! Advertise these sessions as early as possible and frequently. Prospective clients need to see an ad or mailing at least three times before actually responding. Before the session, be sure to coach the client on selecting a weather-appropriate wardrobe in colors that harmonize with the clothing selected by the other portrait subjects. When scheduling these sessions, remember that time of day important. Schedule the sessions early in the morning (from about sunrise to two hours after sunrise) or late in the evening (two hours prior to sunset). Also, attempt

Getaway sessions encourage the sale of larger (e.g., wall-size) portraits that allow viewers to see both the family portrait and the scenery.

to pick a reasonably isolated location where people are not in the background. Always use reflectors rather than on-camera flash. If you have an assistant, use a Quantum Qflash on a pole, not a light stand. Also, use a long lens and limit the depth of field as you would in any other environmental portrait session. Be sure to travel light, since you may have to walk a short distance.

The most popular products from Getaway sessions are custom framed images and holiday cards. Getaway sessions encourage the sale of larger (e.g., wall-size) portraits. Clients want to be able to appreciate the quality of their family portrait as well as the scenery, and you can't do that with an 8x10-inch print.

Recap

Though most parents will admit that updating their child's portrait throughout the years is important, it is one of the first things people tend

Track Your Success

Use studio management software (such as Photo One Studio, available at www.photoonesoftware.com) to track the success of your marketing campaigns. A good program will benefit your company by providing you year-to-date and month-to-date sales reports, so you know when you're falling behind or moving forward. It will give you all sorts of statistical reports for each marketing campaign, including sales averages, production time, etc. It will even let you know who your best customers are and what they are buying!

to put off when their schedules begin to fill up. By offering the sessions outlined in this chapter throughout the year, you will constantly remind your clients to think about photographing their loved ones and encourage repeat business.

No matter what phase of the portrait life cycle you are in with a particular client, be sure to follow these important steps:

1. Know what you are going to capture during each session and how you are going to capture it.
2. Don't try to create every portrait in your creative arsenal in a single session.
3. Have specific poses for each session to create a branded look.
4. Have specific products your studio will promote for each session.
5. Offer incentive pricing and use gift-with-purchase items to reward your loyal customers.

Having specific "signature" poses can help your studio create a branded look.

6. Direct Mail Marketing

Every business should strive to expand their customer base and should also devote their time and attention to nurturing their relationship with existing clients. One of the most effective means of keeping your studio on your clients' minds is delivering direct mail promotions. The more companies rely on sending e-mail to reach their clients, the more direct mail stands out and commands the recipient's attention.

When you regularly mail printed newsletters or postcards informing clients of the goings on at your studio, they begin to anticipate them and will read them. You keep them in the loop regarding your upcoming portrait events and important tips they may need to know. You can advertise sales, special offers, limited edition portraits—anything you want to draw attention to.

> "The goal of a direct mail campaign is to grab the reader's attention."

Planning Your Campaign

The goal of a direct mail campaign is to grab the reader's attention and communicate your intended message. Your direct mail pieces should make the same statement about your studio and your work that your other advertising methods (e.g., web site, print ads in newspapers or magazines, etc.) convey. This will help to create brand identity.

Use the available technology to facilitate sending your mailings and tracking the results of your direct mail campaign. This will help you to target your marketing and get more clients for your efforts—in less time. There was a time when our studio would get a lead list from a magazine we advertised with. We would order a thousand postcards designed by Jeff for as little as $100 from a postcard printing company we found online.

The Third Time's the Charm

People need to see your mailing or ad at least three times before responding. Once they have, you can typically expect a 3 to 5 percent response rate. Note that because repetition is key, you will have more success in sending a mailing to a group of six hundred people three months in a row than you will mailing a single newsletter or postcard to six thousand people only once.

Direct mail can help attract new clients to your studio. Your products and services can make them clients for life.

We'd have someone print labels, label the postcards, stamp the cards, and deliver them to the post office.

For years, we walked past the Marathon Press booth at trade shows. We never stopped to check on their costs, because they appeared to be so much more expensive than the method we were using. To our surprise, we found that using the company's Marketing Partnership software actually saved us time and money. With a few clicks of a button, we were able to have the cards printed and mail to their general client data base or to specialty databases for as little as 51 cents a piece.

Using studio management software (like Photo One Studio available from www.photoonesoftware.com) will help give you an accurate overview of your marketing results, cost ratios, and figures to use to measure the success of your campaign. After all, no business can afford to waste money on an advertising campaign. If you are carefully tracking and measuring the results of each direct mail campaign, then future advertising efforts can be fine-tuned.

Regardless of what company you choose to help you with your direct mail advertising campaigns, be sure they can assist you in generating quality direct mail lists. There are three ways to acquire the addresses of prospective clients:

1. Use your studio management software to upload and export your own list.
2. Purchase a list from a list source. Keep in mind, though, that such lists often contain duplicate entries and invalid addresses, making many of the leads useless. On a positive note, many addresses will be correct, too. One of our studio's very best celebrity clients came from a lead list purchased through Marathon's Press's Marketing Partnership software. Just be prepared to have some of your cards bounce back in the mail, and do not get discouraged.
3. Team up with another company and share your mailing lists. For instance, if the album company you work with solicits sales from the same demographic your studio wishes to target, you could both benefit by targeting these prospective clients. Likewise, if your lab offers

BELOW AND FACING PAGE—Consider running a Furry Friends promotion in January for all your customers with Furry Friends. Maybe even do it on a special day and hold a "Yappy Hour."

EAST SIDE
COLLECTION

consumer printing, but you pay more for their professional services, it may be beneficial for them to help you succeed.

Strive to map out your marketing plan so you can annually project your financial investment and your return on investments. For instance, your direct mail campaign might include the following:

January—Wedding event direct mail campaign
February—Love Portrait promotion
March—Day with the Ducklings promotion
April—Bunny Portraits
May—Getaway session
June—Take Me Out to the Ball Game session
July—Gone Fishing session

Try marketing a Baby Ballerina theme for customers in the summer months to build portrait sales opportunities.

LEFT—By August, decide if you will be promoting an autumn harvest theme and begin marketing it to your clients to take advantage of preholiday sales.

RIGHT—Try creating an Ice Princess or Winter Wonderland promotion for clients who don't elect to take advantage of a Dickens Christmas set.

August—Furry Friends back-to-school special
September—Baby Ballerinas session
October—Family Portrait Getaway session
November—Dickens' Christmas Special
December—Ice Princess holiday promotion

Keep in mind, in order to make the above direct mail promotions work you will need to know your target market and the correct drop date for each mailing. You will need to ensure that the promotion starts early enough and ends soon enough to allow you to capture, sell, prep, and deliver the images before a holiday, if applicable. If you begin to break down all your promotions in this format, you will be amazed at how well you will be able to forecast your budget for the year and project the growth of your business.

For illustrative purposes, let's say you want to alert your demographic to your limited edition portrait campaign. Cards announcing the event should be sent to existing clients or the people whose names appear on a qualified list. To ensure the best-possible return for your efforts, you will target a group of five hundred clients/prospective clients three times.

The new business you will attract from running a direct mail campaign will usually more than pay for the cost of the mailings.

When we plug in some numbers, we can see that the cost of running the campaign pales in comparison to the profits you could reasonably expect:

1. 500 leads x 3 card mailings each = 1,500 cards
2. 1,500 cards @ 51 cents each (at this writing, this is Marathon Press's cost per card) = $765
3. 500 leads with a 3 percent response ratio = 15 customers
4. 15 customers with a sales average of $500 each = $7,500 profit
5. $7,500 – $765 (cost for the cards) = $6,735 profit

Though there may be some other costs associated with running the promotion, it's easy to see that the net profit should still ensure a successful studio campaign!

7. Internet Marketing

The Internet has changed businesses in many ways over the years. It helps businesses work at a distance and share files with one another. It permits managers to access computers off site, and it allows people to access information found in libraries and encyclopedias in a matter of seconds and from the comfort of their own homes. Most importantly, the Internet creates company exposure to people all over the world who in the past would never have seen or heard of your studio!

"It is without a doubt the fastest way to distribute information all over the world."

Companies take advantage of advertising and selling over the Internet daily. This type of marketing is often referred to as e-commerce. It is without a doubt the fastest way to distribute information all over the world. With the use of e-mail marketing campaigns, blogging strategies, and online ordering opportunities, the Internet allows businesses to provide personalized marketing and constant dialog with their consumer base—and it does so better than any other advertising medium.

E-mail

With so many computer savvy clients carrying Blackberries and iPhones, more businesses than ever before are relying on e-mail as a major form of communication. For many studios, the primary marketing demographic is clients between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five, and people in this age range rely heavily on e-mail as a means of communication.

A Farfetched Concept . . .

Years ago, when I was an admissions advisor at a university, a gentleman tried to sell me on the concept of advertising in a shopping mall that did not physically exist. I remember him showing me a diagram of a tower in space and explaining that retailers would buy a block on this tower and people could shop from stores in outer space from the comfort of their homes. His description may have been a little different than that, but that is sincerely what I recall today. Not being an Internet entrepreneur, I thought this guy was on drugs! Well, what once seemed like a farfetched concept—the World Wide Web—now exists and is the cornerstone of many small businesses.

Marathon
edit preview proof send
Due to popular demand, we have been asked
to conduct an East Coast
Beach Portrait Session held
in Cape Canaveral on
July 13th, 14th, 15th
with no travel charge!
Sessions are limited to the first 20 couples/families
who RSVP.

Sending e-mail is fast and simple, and it's the least expensive marketing option. Because e-mail marketing requires no printing or postage it can cost just pennies per name to rent the list, deliver the message, and track your results. E-mailing your demographic is a wonderful way to create rapport and establish an ongoing dialogue with your existing and prospective customers. Many companies believe e-mail communication is better than direct mail campaigns or telemarketing calls. This is because most of the people who receive your e-mails have opted to receive your newsletters, promotions, etc.

To create a successful e-mail marketing campaign, follow these simple guidelines:

1. Define your target audience and create e-mails specifically targeted to each group of recipients. It is better to send several target-specific e-mails than one e-mail newsletter that suits your entire clientele or demographic.
2. Include opt-out instructions in your e-mail updates. Note that spam legislation grants ten days for a company to handle opt-out requests.
3. Use the subject line! These are the most important words in your campaign. If you don't choose them carefully, you may decrease the

ABOVE—Using e-mail newsletter software (like the e-mail newsletter available from Marathon Press) helps build your business image while maintaining control of your marketing. It also ensures that your solicitations are welcomed by the recipients, because those who do not wish to receive your e-correspondence can choose to opt out.

ABOVE—Using e-mail notifications, you can contact your clientele regularly, so they never miss a portrait opportunity.

You're a photographer—so make sure your e-mails showcase at least a few of your latest images.

likelihood that your e-mail is read. Avoid using too many exclamation points in the subject line. They may trigger a spam block.

4. Use an e-mail newsletter program to make your e-mails attractive. You are in the photography industry. Your e-mails should include photographs!
5. Get your e-mail address in your client's address book. Your correspondence is more likely to bypass spam and junk filters if you remind customers to add you to their address book.
6. Ask permission to e-mail clients. Build a true, permission-based e-mail list.
7. Don't overuse capitalization. Lowercase words, phrases, and headlines are easier to read. Occasionally, a capitalized heading can grab attention, but using the tactic too often is overkill.
8. Avoid relying too heavily upon any one element in the design of the e-mail. Too much contrast or too much of any one design concept can make the e-mail visually unappealing.
9. Track and read your results. Know who opened the e-mail, clicked through the e-mail, viewed links, and opted out.
10. Continuously look for ways to generate new e-mail contacts. This will help you build your client base and increase profits.

Earlier in the book, I noted that a client who is worth $100.00 to your business over one session is worth thousands of dollars over the course of a lifetime. The increase in revenue comes from retention efforts. In order to market effectively to your e-mail base, you need to market to them individually, not en masse. They have to feel as though your e-mails are important, not junk they should delete from their inbox. Ensuring that your communications are well received has a lot to do with the type of offers your company provides; of course, the frequency with which you deliver the correspondence and the content of the message is also important. Some examples of e-mail marketing campaigns that might work for your company may include e-mail newsletters, special offers, holiday updates and promotions, and even portrait program membership announcements.

Blogs

Many individuals and companies maintain a web log, commonly referred to as a blog. Writing a blog can be an effective way to cultivate a relationship with your clients. When clients can read a bit about your life, they can associate a public face with your business. If you are already blogging or considering establishing a blogging system, be sure to define your objective. If you have a clear objective, blogging can be a profitable venture. Without a clear goal in mind, blogging can be a waste of time that detracts from your ability to handle other important tasks.

"It must also be interesting and go deeper than the content of your latest e-mail."

In order to operate a successful blog, you must be sure to update it regularly. It must also be interesting and should contain information that goes deeper than the content of your latest e-mail. Remember, a client must go to the trouble of accessing your blog to read your posting. If your blog contains only basic information that you could have put in your e-mail, why have the viewer go through the trouble of directing the client to your blog?

Here are five reasons why every business owner should create a blog:

1. People connect and bond with people they know and like, and by reading your blog, your marketing demographic gets to know you better. This is even more important in larger studios. If the main contact person with your company is a salesperson or an associate photographer, the blog might help the business owner or the premier photographer stay in contact with the clients they do not see as frequently. Also, some businesses encourage staff to fill in blogs with ad-

Getting There

Insert a link to your blog in the body of your e-mail. This will easily allow your existing clients to get an idea of what you're up to, and prospective clients can get to know you. Remember, this connection is essential in building and maintaining a strong client/photographer relationship.

If you feature images from your latest sessions on your blog, the client is sure to send a link to their friends and family—meaning more exposure for you.

vice pertaining to their specific area of expertise. This helps your clientele develop a rapport with all the employees that make up the business.

2. Blogging can help you look like an expert, an authoritative figure in your field. If you write entries for a blog, you must have something to say. This may make your message appear valuable.
3. Blogging can improve your company's brand recognition. It is typically a faster and more effective means of letting your audience know about the goings on in your life and in the studio than using press releases.

GRAND BOHEMIAN
GALLERY

Blog Guidelines

Before beginning your blog, post a list of blog rules somewhere on your site. Clearly define your guidelines regarding content, confidentiality, language, copyright, defamation, privacy, personal use, and retention. We recommend that you prohibit anonymous blogging. This will help lower your risk of spam blogging, which is often called splogging.

Your goal for your blog should be to show your personality as well as the business identity and personality of your company. Have fun, yet maintain a professional appearance.

Use photographs and video clips. See www.youtube.com for information on adding video clips and slide shows to your site. The benefit of using a YouTube video clip is that you can put them on the Internet without using any bandwidth, and you won't need a server to serve out videos. This will make it easier for you and your clients to view.

Consider giving readers something to do on your blog page—let them watch a video, print out a coupon, subscribe to e-newsletters, or voice an opinion. If you ask for a comment, they will most likely give you one.

Do not use free blog creation/hosting services. Instead, invest in a blog solution that will help maintain control and eliminate spam and splogs on your posting pages.

Finally, you should not blog because you think you're supposed to, but because you have something to share with your audience.

4. Blogs that are rich in key words or key phrases are more readily found by search engines and optimize your Internet presence.
5. Blogging can help build a loyal customer base and encourage client retention.

As a blog host, you are not required to post all of your readers' comments, but you should treat them with professional courtesy. It is important for bloggers to respond to what their clients write, good or bad. If not, your audience may feel as if you are hiding something. Before beginning a blog, you should ask yourself if you really want to provide a forum for disgruntled employees, customers, and competitors to criticize your business. You should retain all blogging records and e-mail records in case you are ever asked to produce a record of your correspondence or provide specific documentation.

MySpace Marketing

When it comes to your marketing efforts, you have two objectives: attracting new customers and providing your existing customers with an ongoing dialogue with value and content. During our consultations, other

FACING PAGE—Blogging is a great way to build strong relationships with your clients. Consider, for example, creating a wedding planning countdown for your brides that offers helpful tips for preparing for their big day!

LEFT AND FACING PAGE—Teens and young adults make up most of the traffic on MySpace—which can make having a site there a good tool for photographers who specialize in high-school senior photography. For other, it makes sense to have a site if only to have your name and key words picked up by search engines.

studio owners often ask us if we have a MySpace account and whether they should get one. The answer is yes, we have one. Though we don't count on it doing much for us, our main hope is that key words and key phrases we have used in our profile are picked up by search engines and that our name is promoted one more time.

Though the www.myspace.com web site is a growing network made up of thousands of people all over the world, it currently appeals predominately to teens and twenty-year-olds and is geared more toward social traffic, not professional traffic. This may change in the years to come, when today's teens become adults and entrepreneurs themselves and bring business onto the site. But for now, unless your specialty is high school senior portrait photography, don't expect a tremendous

"Myspace.com is a growing network made up of thousands of people all over the world."

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE—E-mailing, blogging, and MySpace networking are online marketing concepts that are here to stay. Only you can decide which strategies will most benefit your company.

amount of profit or growth to stem from your MySpace advertising or page presence. People who would not randomly stop by your studio probably won't randomly view your MySpace page, either. However, if your customer has a MySpace account and accepts you as a friend, it could help to create awareness about special broadcasts or campaigns. Most current MySpace users do not have the resources or perhaps the knowledge to create their own web site. This, too, may be a reason why it does not have a reputation as a haven for professionals. For instance, the control of the content and text boxes is not flexible: the details box will include titles

Internet marketing is the fastest and best way to spread information worldwide, while at the same time building rapport with your customers.

such as marital status, age, zodiac sign, and heroes, and these are not categories we recommend featuring in your marketing materials.

Keep in mind that, similar to registering to receive a blog on a blog page, if you are going to use a MySpace page, you will need to create a broadcast strong enough to compel someone to accept your friend request and read it or it won't do you any good.

Recap

The bottom line is this: e-mailing, blogging, and MySpace networking are online marketing concepts that are here to stay. Only you can decide whether or not your company will benefit from taking advantage of this technology. Though possibly time consuming, these marketing trends are gaining in popularity. There is no question that Internet marketing is the fastest and best way to spread information worldwide, while at the same time building rapport with your customers.

8. Giving Back to Others

In earlier chapters, I offered a variety of tips for seeking out your target audience, getting prospective clients through your door, and making client relationships that last a lifetime. I've said that the bond you develop with your clients and the professional image you establish will in large part determine your success. However, your overall image is so much

There are hundreds of children in metropolitan Orlando in need of permanent, loving families. We work with the Heart Gallery project to help achieve this goal. Pictures we have created of these children for the Heart Gallery appear throughout this chapter.

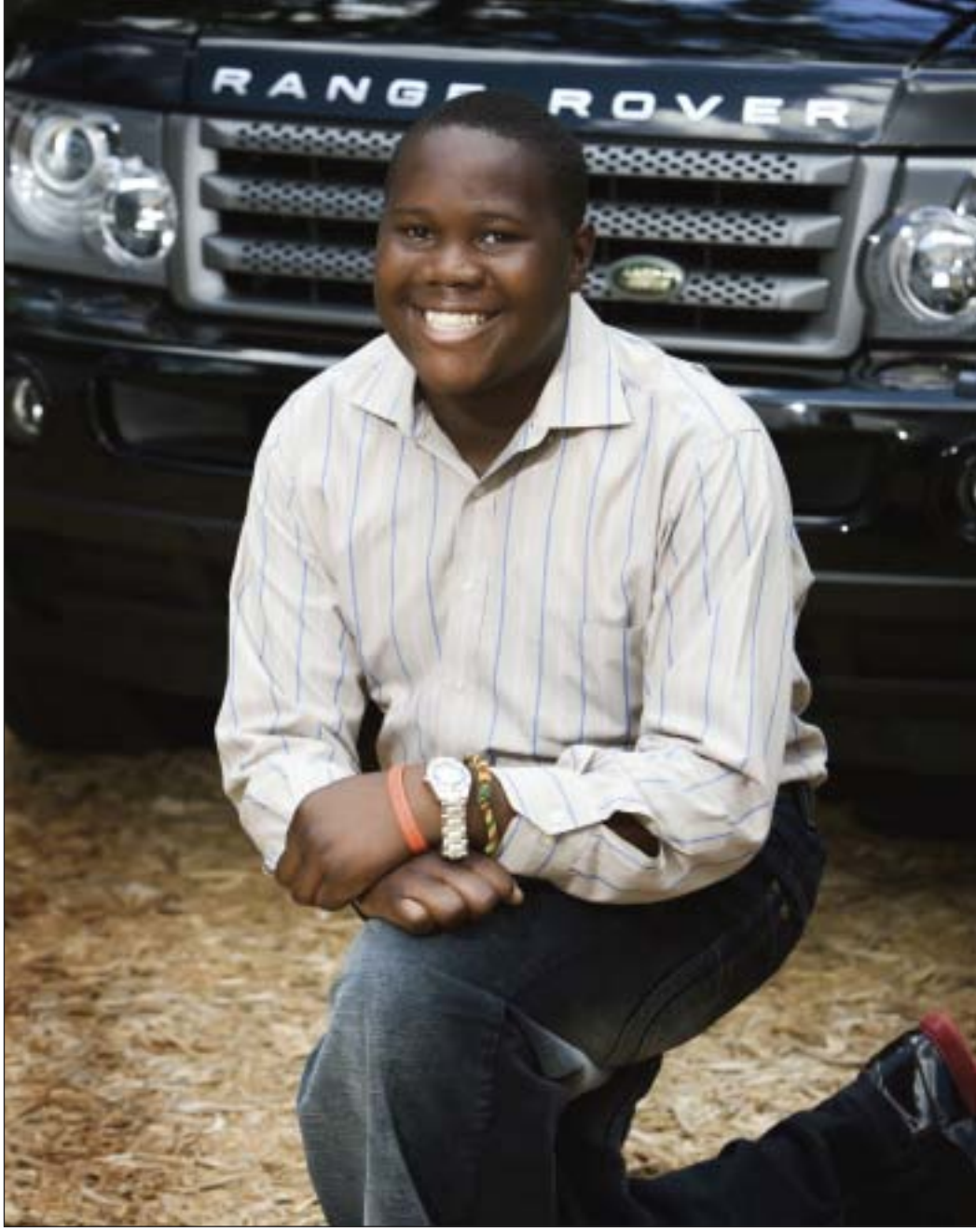
more than just your letterhead, web site, or printed marketing materials. The way the public views you is also governed by your attitude toward life, people, and the world around you. Successful business owners know that caring and being compassionate about the people in your life and your community can lead to many personal and professional rewards.

There is so much more to this business than how much money you make and how many images you sell or how large the portrait you have taken is printed. We need to remember to make people feel special and to develop and nurture our relationships. All too often, other studio owners tell us they would like to donate their services or use their talents to help others but just don't have the time or the resources to help.

"Caring about the people in your life and your community can lead to many rewards."

The Heart Gallery of Metro Orlando is an innovative, gallery-style photo exhibit that highlights approximately one hundred children in central Florida's foster care system currently awaiting adoption.

After the first year working with the Heart Gallery, we realized that it was not just about capturing the child's personality or their portrait. It was about taking a moment to see into their soul and make them feel special.



Making Time to Make a Difference

Time management is a difficult task for many photographers, often because they feel the need to complete and control too many aspects of their business. If you find yourself in this predicament, consider delegating undesirable tasks to your employees, and turn your attention to those tasks for which you are best suited. It is a good idea to hire an employee who possesses strengths you lack. This way, your talents are complementary. Often small business owners gravitate toward hiring people who are most like them, and then there is always a weak link in the studio.

Remember, just because you can do something does not mean you should. For instance, think about retaining the help of a professional to complete your bookkeeping rather than making your own QuickBooks entries. Consider using a company like Marathon Press to design your marketing materials rather than trying your hand as a graphic artist. Send your

ABOVE AND FACING PAGE—After adopting three children of our own from the Central Florida foster care system, we discovered the tremendous need for people to realize how many children in America need warm, loving homes and how desperately we need to educate the community on this national crisis.

prints off to a lab or hire an album company that can design, print, and bind your albums so you have time behind your camera or to network and build relationships with prospective clients. Do whatever it takes to free up your time and focus on revenue generating activities so you can use your talent where and when you need to in order to help others as well. After all, when you have been blessed with a gift so precious that you could change someone's life tomorrow, you don't have time *not* to use it. Amazingly, the photographers who devote themselves and their talents most are also the most successful, busiest people we know today!

Helping to change a person's life one image at a time can be simple. First, find a cause you are passionate about. Next, offer to dedicate yourself completely to the task. Don't just offer photography in hopes that you might get some publicity in exchange. Offer your heart. Get involved, join a committee. Get to know the people who are most actively involved in the project and let them see your passion. It will be worth every moment you invest. This type of work has been rewarding beyond compare for us.

The Heart Gallery

After adopting three children of our own from the Central Florida foster care system, we discovered the tremendous need for people to realize how

many children in America need warm, loving homes and how desperately we need to educate the community on this national crisis. Prior to meeting our children, every bit of research we did led us down a path toward a private, international adoption. That is great for some families, but we now ask, "Why go to a different county when we have kids in our own backyard who need a place to call home and a family to love them?"

"In the past, most of the children available had their photographs taken by a case worker."

There are hundreds of children in metropolitan Orlando in need of permanent, loving families. Many of these children have been abused or neglected, but they have the opportunity to thrive in a stable, nurturing environment. In the past, most of the children available for adoption in the foster care system had their photographs taken by a case worker; the image was poorly scanned and then used on a web site

In 2005, 41 percent of children featured in the Heart Gallery Tampa Bay exhibit were successfully matched with families due to the support of the Tampa Area Professional Photographers Association!

where people could view the children available for adoption. These poor-quality images did not represent the child in a manner that would help find them a family.

Several years ago, our studio proudly teamed up with FSMO (Family Services of Metro Orlando) and their partners to sponsor the Heart Gallery exhibit and fund-raising events. The Heart Gallery of Metro Orlando is an innovative, gallery-style photo exhibit that highlights approximately one hundred children in central Florida's foster care system currently awaiting adoption. The images rotate throughout the community in different venues, raising awareness of the critical need for more foster and adoptive parents. (*Note:* Other Heart Galleries are featured in more than seventy cities nationwide. Each gallery is unique and is created to suit a community and its needs.) In 2005, 41 percent of children featured in the Heart Gallery Tampa Bay exhibit resulted in successful matches with families due to the support of the Tampa Area Professional Photographers Association! To view the rest of the gallery or learn more about how you can help this worthy group, please visit www.heartgallerymetroorlando.org.

When we first got involved with the Heart Gallery, we set out to help capture an image of these children for the exhibit that would make the children more marketable by showing their personality. However, after the first year, we discovered so much more. It was not about capturing their personality or their portrait. It was about taking a moment to see into their soul and make them feel special. It was about giving them the attention they had needed for so long.

Once, we had a child come into our studio. He had an "attitude." (Who could blame him, considering what he had experienced already in his short life?) He told us, "I don't want to be adopted. This is stupid. I just want to turn eighteen and get on with my life."

Jeff took him outside and spent about thirty minutes capturing his session—talking, laughing, and getting to know him better. The fourteen-year-old boy with the gangster exterior left for the session a tough hotshot and came back a sweet little teddy bear. He looked up at Jeff with big blue eyes and said, "I really do want a home and someone to love me. I just haven't found anyone who would."

As we worked with the Heart Gallery project, we came to realize that our job was not just about taking a picture. It was about taking a moment to see into a child's soul and make them feel special.

The next child who touched us deeply was a young lady who came in with the saddest expression. She hung her head low and avoided eye contact as much as possible. We took our time and captured the session gracefully and casually, allowing her an opportunity to warm up. When she was finished, she looked up at us with a huge grin and said, "Nobody ever made me feel pretty before!" She ran to us and gave us a huge hug.

From that moment on, we knew it was our passion, our job, our mission in life to use the talent we have been blessed with to photograph these children and begin to change their lives and the world, one image at a time! We hope you will find it in your heart to do something special with your talent too!

Conclusion

Regardless of your personal or professional business goals, just remember that what you do with what you have is entirely up to you. So many photographers get wrapped up in being artists that they forget to make money. To truly benefit from the suggestions in this book and to optimize your success, consider the following basic principles.

First, constantly look for ways to evolve professionally, personally, and spiritually. You have to continuously strive to grow. This can be done by striving to reach a new goal. For instance, you might set a goal of making this month's production higher than last month's. Many businesses hire a business coach or mentor to coach them to the next level and help them overcome obstacles to achieve goals. Often, an outsider's view can shed a lot of light on your vision. Alternately, some businesses use books, seminars, and classes as a way to keep ahead and evolve to the next level. Your education should always be ongoing; you are never too good to grow.

"Your education should always be ongoing; you are never too good to grow."

Second, remember to see people as people. Work on perfecting your interpersonal skills and master customer relations. Life is so much more enjoyable when you see people as associates and friends instead as potential revenue generators. A true people person will build relationships and make them solid. It is that commitment, dedication, and loyalty, that evolves businesses to a new level.

Third, always be true to yourself. If something feels wrong, it probably is wrong. Follow your heart and follow your passion. It is that passion that is going to take your artwork to the next level and cultivate your creativity. Without passion, profits never matter.

Additional Resources

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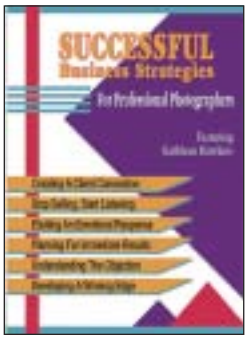

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To hear actual, unscripted phone consultations, visit www.kathleenhawkins.com and view information on her *Successful Business Strategies* DVD. The disc contains eight hours of edited content, two weeks of telephone techniques, and three live client sales consultations!

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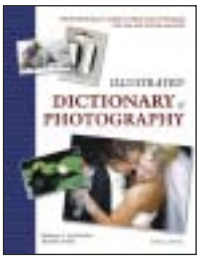

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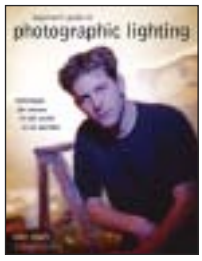

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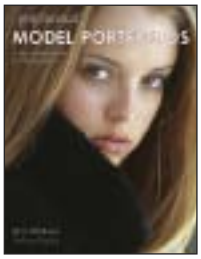

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